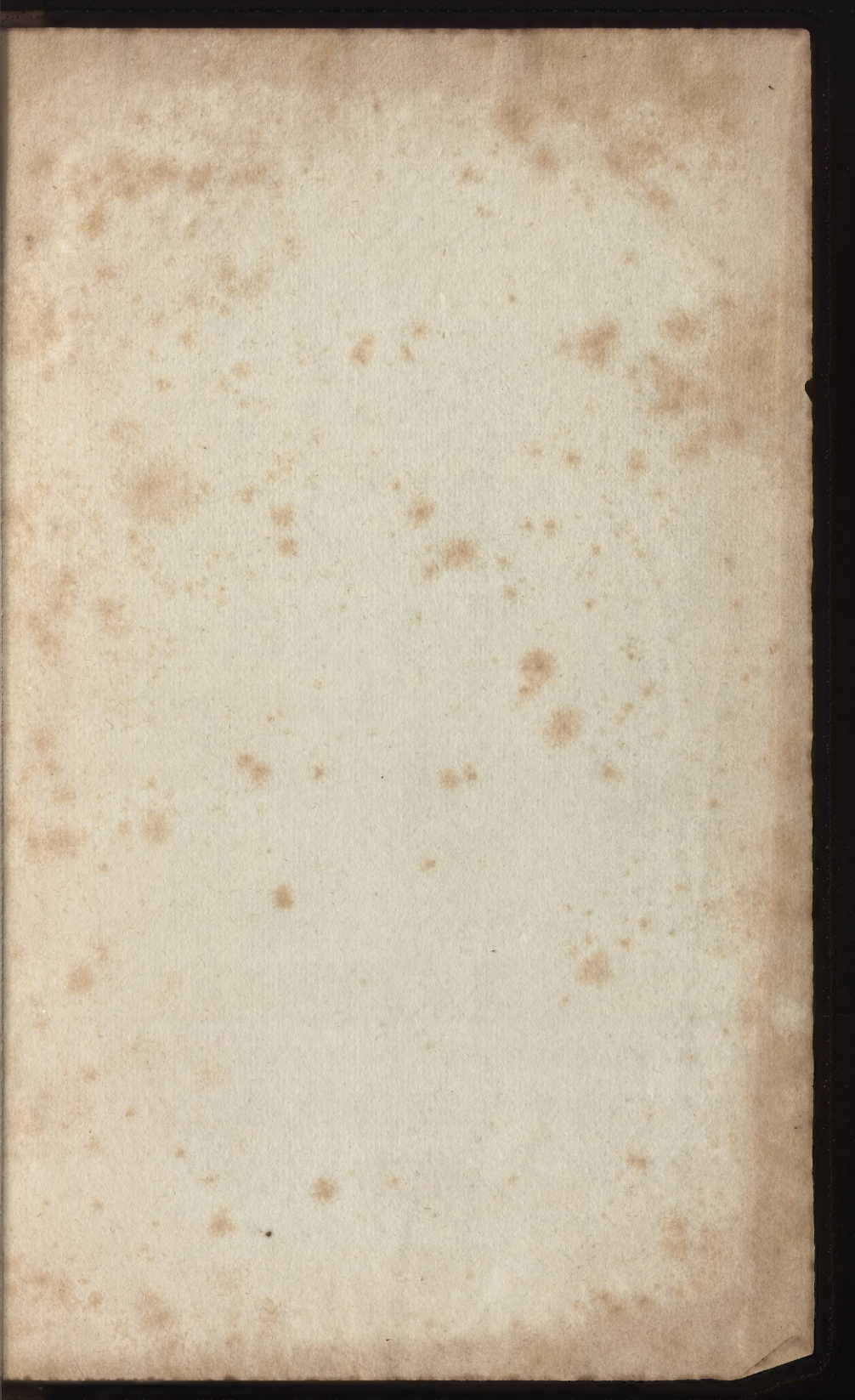
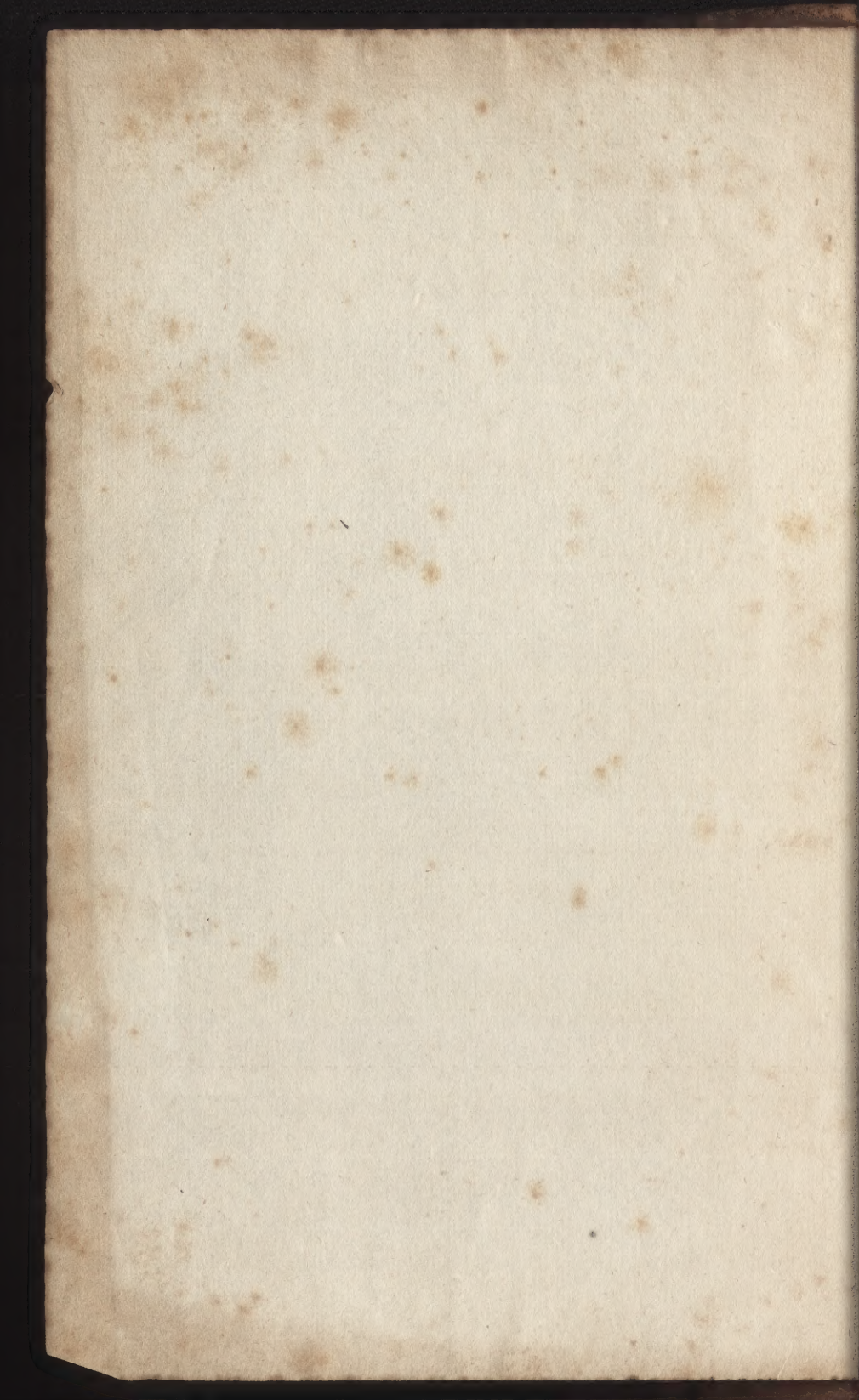


L

185.00  
Bcool







THE  
LIFE AND STUDIES  
OF  
BENJAMIN WEST, Esq.

PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF  
LONDON,

Prior to his Arrival in England;

COMPILED FROM MATERIALS FURNISHED BY HIMSELF,

BY JOHN GALT.

---

PHILADELPHIA:  
PUBLISHED BY MOSES THOMAS.

J. Maxwell, Printer.

1816.



## PREFACE.

---

THE professional life of Mr. West constitutes an important part of an historical work, in which the matter of this volume could only have been introduced as an episode, and, perhaps, not with much propriety even in that form. It was my intention, at one time, to have prepared the whole of his memoirs, separately, for publication; but a careful review of the manuscript convinced me, that the transactions in which he has been engaged, subsequently to his arrival in England, are so much of a public nature, and belong so immediately to the history of the arts, that such a separation could not be effected without essentially impairing the interest and unity of the main design; and that the particular nature of this portion of his memoirs admitted of being easily detached and arranged into a whole, complete within itself.

I do not think that there can be two opinions with respect to the utility of a work of this kind. Mr. West, in relating the circumstances by which he was led to approximate, without the aid of an instructor, to those principles and rules of art, which it is the object of schools and academies to disseminate, has conferred a greater benefit on young artists than he could possibly have done by the most ingenious and eloquent lectures on the theories of his profession; and it was necessary that the narrative should appear in his own time, in order that the authenticity of the incidents might not rest on the authority of any biographer.

JOHN GALT.

*April 25, 1816.*

## CONTENTS.

---

### CHAPTER I.

- I. The birth and paternal ancestry of Mr. West. II. His maternal family. III. His father. IV. The origin of the abolition of slavery by the quakers. V. The progress of the abolition. VI. The education of the negroes. VII. The preaching of Edmund Peckover. VIII. His admonitory prediction to the father of West. IX. The first indication of Benjamin's genius. X. State of society in Pennsylvania. XI. The Indians give West the primary colours. XII. The artist's first pencils. XIII. The present of a box of colours and engravings. XIV. His first painting. . . . page 9

### CHAPTER II.

- I. The artist visits Philadelphia. II. His second picture. III. Williams the painter gives him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson. IV. Anecdote of the taylor's apprentice. V. The drawings of the schoolboys. VI. Anecdote relative to Wayne. VII. Anecdote relative to Mr. Flower. VIII. Anecdote relative to Mr. Ross. IX. Anecdote of Mr. Henry. X. The artist's first historical picture. XI. Origin of his acquaintance with Dr. Smith of Philadelphia. XII. The friendship of Dr. Smith, and the character of the early companions of West. XIII. Anecdote of general Washington. . . 37

## CHAPTER III.

- I. The course of instruction adopted by provost Smith. II. The artist led to the discovery of the Camera. III. His father becomes anxious to place him in business. IV. Extraordinary proceedings of the quakers in consequence. V. The speech of Williamson the preacher in defence of the fine arts. VI. Magnanimous resolution of the quakers. VII. Reflections on this singular transaction. page 59

## CHAPTER IV.

- I. Reflections on the eccentricities of young men of genius with respect to pecuniary matters. II. The death of the artist's mother. III. The embodying of the Pennsylvania militia; an anecdote of general Wayne. IV. The artist elected commandant of a corps of volunteer boys. V. The circumstances which occasioned the search for the bones of Braddock's army. VI. The search. VII. The discovery of the bones of the father and brother of sir Peter Halket. VIII. The artist proposed afterwards to paint a picture of the discovery of the bones of the Halkets. IX. He commences regularly as a painter. X. He copies a St. Ignatius. XI. He is induced to attempt historical portraiture. XII. His picture of the trial of Susannah. XIII. Of the merits of that picture. - - - - 76

## CHAPTER V.

- I. Motives which induced him to visit New York. II. State of society in New York. III. Reflections on the sterility of American talent. IV. Considerations on the circumstances which tend to produce poetical feelings. V. The causes which produced the peculiarities in the state of society in New York. VI. The accident which led the artist to discover the method of colouring candle-light and fire effects after nature. VII. He copies Strange's engraving of Belisarius, by Salvator Rosa. VIII. The occurrence which hastened his voyage to Italy, with the anecdote of his obligations to Mr. Kelly. IX. Reflections on Plutarch, occasioned by reference to the effect which his works had on the mind of West. X. The artist embarks; occurrence at Gibraltar. XI. He arrives at Leghorn. XII. Journey to Rome. - - - - 96

## CONTENTS.

3

### CHAPTER VI.

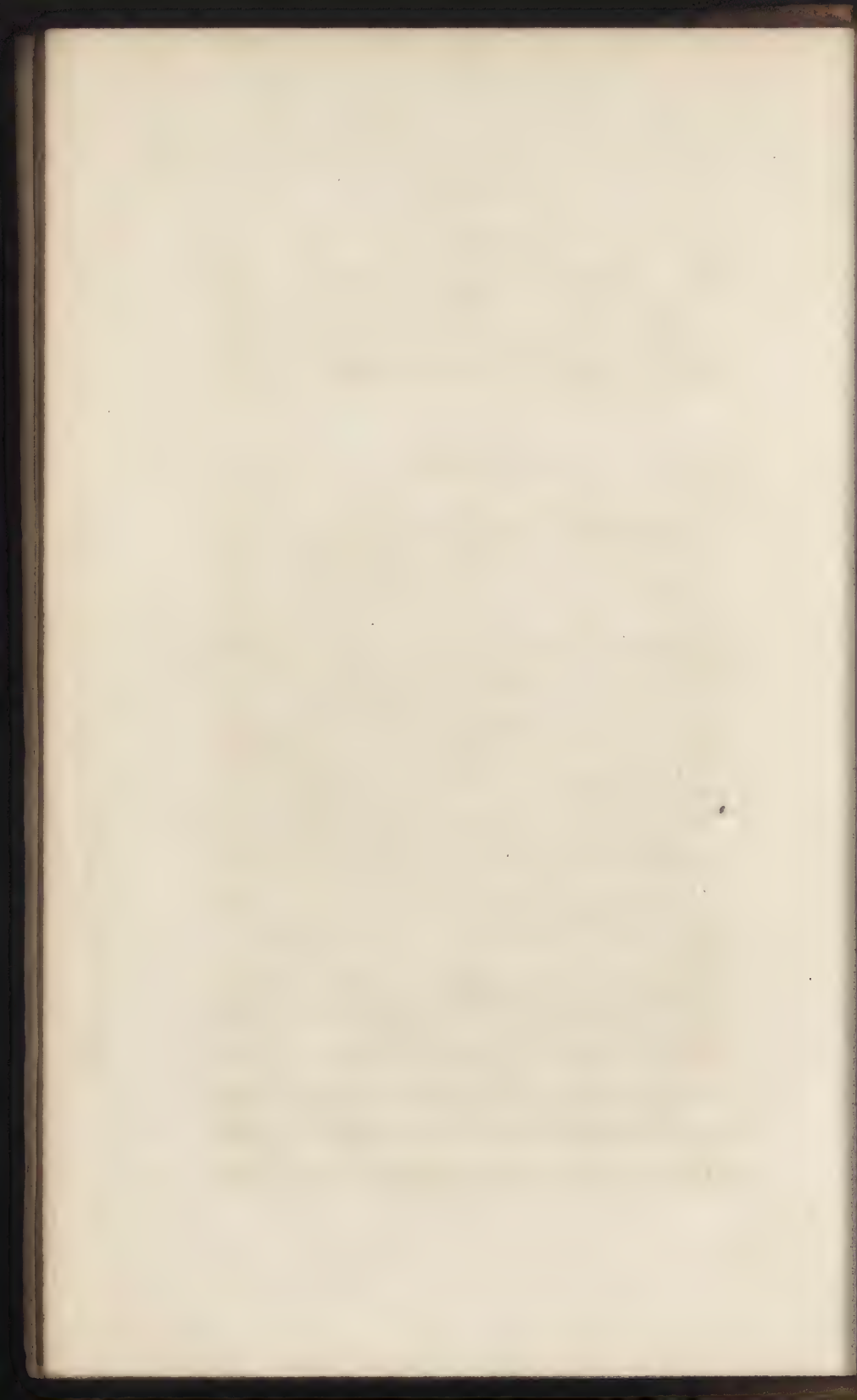
- I. State of the stationary society of Rome. II. Causes which rendered the city a delightful temporary residence. III. Defects of the academical methods of study. IV. His introduction to Mr. Robinson. V. Anecdote of cardinal Albani. VI. The cardinal's method of finding resemblances, and curious mistake of the Italians. VII. The artist's first visit to the works of art. - - - page 120

### CHAPTER VII.

- I. Anecdote of a famous improvisatore. II. West the subject of one of his finest effusions. III. Anecdote of cardinal Albani. IV. West introduced to Mengs. V. Satisfactory result of West's first essay in Rome. VI. Consequence of the continual excitement which the artist's feelings endured. VII. He goes to Florence for advice. VIII. He accompanies Mr. Matthews in a tour. IX. Singular instance of liberality towards the artist from several gentlemen of Philadelphia. - - - - - 142

### CHAPTER VIII.

- I. The result of the artist's experiment to discover the methods by which Titian produced his splendid colouring. II. He returns to Rome. III. Reflections suggested, by inspecting the Egyptian obelisk. IV. Considerations of the author on the same subject; and anecdote of a Mohawk Indian who became an actor at New York. V. Anecdote of a Scotch fanatic who arrived in Rome to convert the pope. VI. Sequel of the adventure. VII. The artist prepares to visit England. VIII. Having completed his St. Jerome, after Corregio's famous picture, he is elected an honorary member of the academy of Parma, and invited to court. IX. He proceeds by the way of Genoa towards France. X. Reflections on the state of Italy. XI. Adventure on reaching the French frontiers. XII. State of taste in France. - - - - - 161



THE  
LIFE AND STUDIES  
OF  
BENJAMIN WEST.

---

CHAPTER I.

I. The Birth and Paternal Ancestry of Mr. West. II. His Maternal Family. III. His Father. IV. The Origin of the Abolition of Slavery by the Quakers. V. The Progress of the Abolition. VI. The Education of the Negroes. VII. The Preaching of Edmund Peckover. VIII. His Admonitory Prediction to the Father of West. IX. The first Indication of Benjamin's Genius. X. State of Society in Pennsylvania. XI. The Indians give West the Primary Colours. XII. The Artist's first Pencils. XIII. The Present of a Box of Colours and Engravings. XIV. His first Painting.

I. **BENJAMIN WEST**, the subject of the following Memoirs, was the youngest son of John West and Sarah Pearson, and was born near Springfield, in Chester county, in the state of Pennsylvania, on the 10th of October, 1738.

The branch of the West family, to which he belongs, has been traced in an unbroken series to the lord Delawarre, who distinguished himself in the great wars of king Edward the third, and particularly at the battle of Cressy, under the immediate command of the black prince. In the reign of Richard the second, the ancestors of Mr. West settled at Long Crandon in Buckinghamshire. About the year 1667 they embraced the tenets of the quakers; and colonel James West, the friend and companion in arms of the celebrated Hampden, is said to have been the first proselyte of the family. In 1699 they emigrated to America.

II. Thomas Pearson, the maternal grandfather of the artist, was the confidential friend of William Penn, and the same person to whom that venerable legislator said, on landing in America, " Providence has brought us safely hither; thou hast been the companion of my perils, what wilt thou that I should call

this place?" Mr. Pearson replied, that "since he had honoured him so far as to desire him to give that part of the country a name, he would, in remembrance of his native city, call it Chester." The exact spot where these patriarchs of the new world first landed, is still pointed out with reverence by the inhabitants. Mr. Pearson built a house and formed a plantation in the neighbourhood, which he called Springfield, in consequence of discovering a large spring of water in the first field cleared for cultivation; and it was near this place that Benjamin West was born.

III. When the West family emigrated, John, the father of Benjamin, was left to complete his education at the great school of the quakers at Uxbridge, and did not join his relations in America till the year 1714. Soon after his arrival he married the mother of the artist; and of the worth and piety of his character we have a remarkable proof in the following transactions, which, perhaps, reflect more

real glory on his family than the achievements of all his heroic ancestors.

IV. As a part of the marriage portion of Mrs. West, he received a negro slave, whose diligence and fidelity very soon obtained his full confidence. Being engaged in trade, he had occasion to make a voyage to the West Indies, and left this young black to superintend the plantation in his absence. During his residence in Barbadoes, his feelings were greatly molested, and his principles shocked, by the cruelties to which he saw the negroes subjected in that island; and the debasing effects were forcibly contrasted in his mind, with the morals and intelligence of his own slave. Conversing on this subject with doctor Gammon, who was then at the head of the community of friends in Barbadoes, the doctor convinced him that it was contrary to the laws of God and Nature that any man should retain his fellow creatures in slavery. This conviction could not rest long inactive in a character

framed like that of Mr. West. On his return to America he gave the negro his freedom, and retained him as a hired servant.

V. Not satisfied with doing good himself, he endeavoured to make others follow his example, and in a short time his arguments had such an effect on his neighbours, that it was agreed to discuss publicly the general question of slavery. This was done accordingly; and, after debating it at many meetings, it was resolved by a considerable majority *that it was the duty of Christians to give freedom to their slaves*. The result of this discussion was soon afterwards followed by a similar proposal to the head meeting of the quakers in the township of Goshen, in Chester county; and the cause of humanity was again victorious. Finally, about the year 1753, the same question was agitated in the annual general assembly at Philadelphia, when it was ultimately established as one of the tenets of the quakers, that no person could re-

main a member of their community who held a human creature in slavery. This transaction is perhaps the first example in the history of communities, of a great public sacrifice of individual interest, not originating from considerations of policy or the exigencies of public danger, but purely from moral and religious principles.

VI. The benevolent work of restoring their natural rights to the unfortunate negroes, did not rest even at this great pecuniary sacrifice. The society of friends went farther, and established schools for the education of their children; and some of the first characters among themselves volunteered to superintend the course of instruction.

VII. In the autumn of 1738, Edmund Peckover, a celebrated orator among the quakers, came to the neighbourhood of Springfield, and on the 28th of September preached in a meeting-house erected by the father of Mrs. West at the distance of about a mile and a half from

his residence. Mrs. West was then the mother of nine children, and far advanced in her pregnancy with Benjamin.—Peckover possessed the most essential qualities of an impressive speaker, and on this occasion the subject of his address was of extraordinary interest to his auditors. He reviewed the rise and progress of society in America, and with an enthusiastic eloquence which partook of the sublimity and vehemence of the prophetic spirit, he predicted the future greatness of the country. He described the condition of the European nations, decrepid in their institutions, and corrupt in their morality, and contrasted them with the young and flourishing establishments of the New World. He held up to their abhorrence the licentious manners and atheistical principles of the court of France, where God was disregarded or forgotten; and, elevated by the importance of his subject, he described the Almighty as mustering his wrath to descend on the nation, and disperse it as chaff in a whirlwind. He called on them to

look towards their home of England, and to see with what eager devotion the inhabitants of that illustrious country worshiped the golden image of commerce, and laid the tribute of all their thoughts on its altars; believing that with the power of the idol alone, they should be able to encounter all calamities. "The day and the hour are, however, hastening on, when the image shall be shaken from its pedestal by the tempest of Jehovah's descending vengeance, its altars shall be overturned, and the worshipers terribly convinced that without the favour of the Almighty God there is no wisdom in man! But," continued this impassioned orator, "from the woes and the crimes of Europe let us turn aside our eyes; let us turn from the worshipers of Commerce, clinging round their idols of gold and silver, and, amidst the wrath, the storm, and the thunder, endeavouring to support them; let us not look at the land of blasphemies; for in the crashing of engines, the gushing of blood, and the shrieking of witnesses more to

be pitied than the victims, the activity of God's purifying displeasure will be heard; while turning our eyes towards the mountains of this new world, the forests shall be seen fading away, cities rising along the shores, and the terrified nations of Europe flying out of the smoke and burning to find refuge here." All his auditors were deeply affected, particularly Mrs. West, who was taken with the pains of labour on the spot. The meeting was broken up; the women made a circle round her as they carried her home, and such was the agitation into which she was thrown, that the consequences had nearly proved fatal both to the mother and the infant.

VIII. This occurrence naturally excited much attention, and became the subject of general conversation. It made a deep impression on the mind of Mr. West, who could not divest himself of a feeling that it indicated something extraordinary in the future fortunes of his child; and when Peckover, soon

afterwards, on his leaving that part of the country, paid him a farewell visit, he took an opportunity of introducing the subject. The warm imagination of the preacher eagerly sympathised with the feelings of his friend. He took him by the hand, and, with emphatic solemnity, said, that a child sent into the world under such remarkable circumstances would prove no ordinary man; and he charged him to watch over the boy's character with the utmost degree of paternal solicitude. It will appear in the sequel, that this singular admonition was not lost on Mr. West.

IX. The first six years of Benjamin's life passed away in calm uniformity; leaving only the placid remembrance of enjoyment. In the month of June, 1745, one of his sisters, who had been married some time before, and who had a daughter, came with her infant to spend a few days at her father's. When the child was asleep in the cradle, Mrs.

West invited her daughter to gather flowers in the garden, and committed the infant to the care of Benjamin during their absence; giving him a fan to flap away the flies from molesting his little charge. After some time the child happened to smile in its sleep, and its beauty attracted his attention. He looked at it with a pleasure which he had never before experienced, and observing some paper on a table, together with pens and red and black ink, he seized them with agitation and endeavoured to delineate a portrait: although at this period he had never seen an engraving or a picture, and was only in the seventh year of his age.

Hearing the approach of his mother and sister, he endeavoured to conceal what he had been doing; but the old lady observing his confusion, inquired what he was about, and requested him to show her the paper. He obeyed, entreating her not to be angry. Mrs. West, after looking some time at the

drawing with evident pleasure, said to her daughter, "I declare he has made a likeness of little Sally," and kissed him with much fondness and satisfaction. This encouraged him to say, that if it would give her any pleasure, he would make pictures of the flowers which she held in her hand; for the instinct of his genius was now awakened, and he felt that he could imitate the forms of those things which pleased his sight.

This curious incident deserves consideration in two points of view. The sketch must have had some merit, since the likeness was so obvious, indicating how early the hand of the young artist possessed the power of representing the observations of his eye. But it is still more remarkable as the birth of the fine arts in the new world, and as one of the few instances in the history of art, in which the first inspiration of genius can be distinctly traced to a particular circumstance. The drawing was shown by Mrs. West to her

husband, who, remembering the prediction of Peckover, was delighted with this early indication of talent in his son. But the fact, though in itself very curious, will appear still more remarkable, when the state of the country at that period, and the peculiar manners of the quakers, are taken into consideration.

X. The institutions of William Penn had been sacredly preserved by the descendants of the first settlers, with whom the remembrance of the causes which had led their ancestors to forsake their native country, was cherished like the traditions of religion, and became a motive to themselves, for indulging in the exercise of those blameless principles, which had been so obnoxious to the arrogant spirit of the old world. The associates of the Wests and the Pearsons, considered the patriarchs of Pennsylvania as having been driven from England, because their endeavours to regulate their conduct by the example of Jesus Christ, mortified the tem-

poral pretensions of those who satisfied themselves with attempting to repeat his doctrines; and they thought that the asylum in America was chosen, to facilitate the enjoyment of that affectionate intercourse which their tenets enjoined, free from the military predilections and political jealousies of Europe. The effect of this opinion tended to produce a state of society more peaceful and pleasing than the world had ever before exhibited. When the American poets shall in future times celebrate the golden age of their country, they will draw their descriptions from the authentic history of Pennsylvania in the reign of king George the second.

From the first emigration in 1681, the colony had continued to thrive with a rapidity unknown to the other European settlements. It was blessed in the maxims upon which it had been founded by William Penn, and richly exhibited the fruits of their beneficent operation. At the birth of Benjamin West

it had obtained great wealth, and the population was increasing much more vigorously than the ordinary re-production of the human species in any other part of the world. In the houses of the principal families, the patricians of the country, unlimited hospitality formed a part of their regular economy. It was the custom among those who resided near the highways, after supper and the last religious exercise of the evening, to make a large fire in the hall, and to set out a table with refreshments for such travellers as might have occasion to pass during the night; and when the families assembled in the morning they seldom found that their tables had been unvisited. This was particularly the case at Springfield. Poverty was never heard of in the land. The disposition to common charity having no objects, was blended with the domestic affections, and rendered the ties of friendship and kindred stronger and dearer. Acts of liberality were frequently performed to an extent that would have

beggared the munificence of the old world. With all these delightful indications of a better order of things, society in Pennsylvania retained, at this time, many of those respectable prejudices which give a venerable grace to manners, and are regarded by the practical philosopher as little inferior in dignity to the virtues. William Penn was proud of his distinguished parentage, and many of his friends traced their lineage to the ancient and noble families of England. In their descendants the pride of ancestry was so tempered with the meekness of their religious tenets, that it lent a kind of patriarchal dignity to their benevolence. In beautiful contrast to the systematic morality of the new inhabitants, was the simplicity of the Indians, who mingled safe and harmless among the friends; and in the annual visits which they were in the practice of paying to the plantations, they raised their huts in the fields and orchards without asking leave, nor were they ever molested. Voltaire has observed,

that the treaty which was concluded between the Indians and William Penn was the first public contract which connected the inhabitants of the old and new world together, and, though not ratified by oaths, and without invoking the Trinity, is still the only treaty that has never been broken. It may be further said, that Pennsylvania is the first country which has not been subdued by the sword, for the inhabitants were conquered by the force of Christian benevolence.

When the great founder of the state marked out the site of Philadelphia in the woods, he allotted a piece of ground for a public library. It was his opinion, that although the labour of clearing the country would long employ the settlers, hours of relaxation would still be requisite; and, with his usual sagacity, he judged that the reading of books was more conducive to good morals and to the formation of just sentiments, than any other species of amusement. The dif-

ferent counties afterwards instituted libraries, which the townships have also imitated: where the population was insufficient to establish a large collection of books, the neighbouring families formed themselves into societies for procuring the popular publications. But in these arrangements for cultivating the powers of the understanding, no provision was made, during the reign of George the second, for improving the faculties of taste. The works of which the libraries then consisted, treated of useful and practical subjects. It was the policy of the quakers to make mankind wiser and better; and they thought that, as the passions are the springs of all moral evil when in a state of excitement, whatever tends to awaken them is unfavourable to that placid tenour of mind which they wished to see diffused throughout the world. This notion is prudent, perhaps judicious; but works of imagination may be rendered subservient to the same purpose. Every thing in Pennsylvania

was thus unpropitious to the fine arts. There were no cares in the bosoms of individuals to require public diversions, nor any emulation in the expenditure of wealth to encourage the ornamental manufactures. In the whole Christian world no spot was apparently so unlikely to produce a painter as Pennsylvania. It might, indeed, be supposed, according to a popular opinion, that a youth, reared among the concentrating elements of a new state, in the midst of boundless forests, tremendous waterfalls, and mountains whose summits were inaccessible to "the lightest foot and wildest wing," was the most favourable situation to imbibe the enthusiasm either of poetry or painting, if scenery and such accidental circumstances are to be regarded as every thing, and original character as nothing. But it may reasonably be doubted if ever natural scenery has any assignable influence on the productions of genius. The idea has probably arisen from the impression which the

magnificence of nature makes on persons of cultivated minds, who fall into the mistake of considering the elevated emotions arising in reality from their own associations, as being naturally connected with the objects that excite them. Of all the nations of Europe the Swiss are the least poetical, and yet the scenery of no other country seems so well calculated as that of Switzerland to awaken the imagination; and Shakspeare, the greatest of all modern poets, was brought up in one of the least picturesque districts of England.

XI. Soon after the occurrence of the incident which has given rise to these observations, the young artist was sent to a school in the neighbourhood. During his hours of leisure he was permitted to draw with pen and ink; for it did not occur to any of the family to provide him with better materials. In the course of the summer a party of Indians came to pay their annual visit to

Springfield, and being amused with the sketches of birds and flowers which Benjamin showed them, they taught him to prepare the red and yellow colours with which they painted their ornaments. To these his mother added blue, by giving him a piece of indigo, so that he was thus put in possession of the three primary colours. The fancy is disposed to expatiate on this interesting fact; for the mythologies of antiquity furnish no allegory more beautiful; and a painter who would embody the metaphor of an artist instructed by Nature, could scarcely imagine any thing more picturesque than the real incident of the Indians instructing West to prepare the prismatic colours. The Indians also taught him to be an expert archer, and he was sometimes in the practice of shooting birds for models, when he thought that their plumage would look well in a picture.

XII. His drawings at length attracted the attention of the neighbours; and some of them happening to regret that the artist had no pencils, he inquired what kind of things these were, and they were described to him as small brushes made of camels' hair fastened in a quill. As there were, however, no camels in America, he could not think of any substitute, till he happened to cast his eyes on a black cat, the favourite of his father; when, in the tapering fur of her tail, he discovered the means of supplying what he wanted. He immediately armed himself with his mother's scissors, and, laying hold of Grimalkin with all due caution, and a proper attention to her feelings, cut off the fur at the end of her tail, and with this made his first pencil. But the tail only furnished him with one, which did not last long, and he soon stood in need of a further supply. He then had recourse to the animal's back, his depredations upon which were so frequently repeated, that his father observed the al-

tered appearance of his favourite, and lamented it as the effect of disease. The artist, with suitable marks of contrition, informed him of the true cause; and the old gentleman was so much amused with his ingenuity, that if he rebuked him, it was certainly not in anger.

Anecdotes of this kind, trifling as they may seem, have an interest independent of the insight they afford into the character to which they relate. It will often appear, upon a careful study of authentic biography, that the means of giving body and effect to their conceptions, are rarely withheld from men of genius. If the circumstances of Fortune are unfavourable, Nature instructs them to draw assistance immediately from herself, by endowing them with the faculty of perceiving a fitness and correspondence in things which no force of reasoning, founded on the experience of others, could enable them to discover. This aptness is, perhaps,

the surest indication of the possession of original talent. There are minds of a high class to which the world, in the latitude of its expressions, often ascribes genius, but which possess only a superior capacity for the application of other men's notions, unconnected with any unusual portion of the inventive faculty.

XIII. In the following year Mr. Pennington, a merchant of Philadelphia, who was related to the West family, came to pay a visit to Mr. West. This gentleman was also a member of the society of friends, and, though strictly attentive to the peculiar observances of the sect, was a man of pleasant temper and indulgent dispositions. He noticed the drawings of birds and flowers round the room, unusual ornaments in the house of a quaker; and heard with surprise that they were the work of his little cousin. Of their merit as pictures he did not pretend to be a judge, but he thought them wonderful productions for

a boy only entering on his eighth year, and being told with what imperfect materials they had been executed, he promised to send the young artist a box of paints and pencils from the city. On his return home he fulfilled his engagement, and at the bottom of the box placed several pieces of canvass prepared for the easel, and six engravings by Grevling.

XIV. The arrival of the box was an æra in the history of the painter and his art. It was received with feelings of delight, which only a similar mind can justly appreciate. He opened it, and in the colours, the oils, and the pencils, found all his wants supplied, even beyond his utmost conceptions. But who can describe the surprise with which he beheld the engravings; he who had never seen any picture but his own drawings, nor knew that such an art as the engraver's existed! He sat over the box with enamoured eyes; his mind was in a flutter of joy; and he could not re-

frain from constantly touching the different articles, to ascertain that they were real. At night he placed the box on a chair near his bed, and as often as he was overpowered by sleep, he started suddenly and stretched out his hand to satisfy himself that the possession of such a treasure was not merely a pleasing dream. He rose at the dawn of day, and carried the box to a room in the garret, where he spread a canvass, prepared a pallet, and immediately began to imitate the figures in the engravings. Enchanted by his art he forgot the school hours, and joined the family at dinner without mentioning the employment in which he had been engaged. In the afternoon he again retired to his study in the garret; and for several days successively he thus withdrew and devoted himself to painting. The schoolmaster, observing his absence, sent to ask the cause of it. Mrs. West, affecting not to take any particular notice of the message, recollected that she had seen Benjamin going up stairs every morn-

ing, and suspecting that the box occasioned his neglect of the school, went to the garret, and found him employed on the picture. Her anger was appeased by the sight of his performance, and changed to a very different feeling. She saw, not a mere copy, but a composition from two of the engravings: with no other guide than that delicacy of sight which renders the painter's eye, with respect to colours, what the musician's ear is to sounds, he had formed a picture as complete, in the scientific arrangement of the tints, notwithstanding the necessary imperfection of the pencilling, as the most skilful artist could have painted, assisted by the precepts of Newton. She kissed him with transports of affection, and assured him that she would not only intercede with his father to pardon him for having absented himself from school, but would go herself to the master, and beg that he might not be punished. The delightful encouragement which this well-judged kindness afforded to the young painter may

be easily imagined; but who will not regret that the mother's over-anxious admiration would not suffer him to finish the picture, lest he should spoil what was already in her opinion perfect, even with half the canvass bare? Sixty-seven years afterwards the writer of these memoirs had the gratification to see this piece in the same room with the sublime painting of "Christ Rejected," on which occasion the painter declared to him that there were inventive touches of art in his first and juvenile essay, which, with all his subsequent knowledge and experience, he had not been able to surpass.

## CHAPTER II.

I. The artist visits Philadelphia. II. His second picture. III. Williams the painter gives him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson. IV. Anecdote of the tailor's apprentice. V. The drawings of the schoolboys. VI. Anecdote relative to Wayne. VII. Anecdote relative to Mr. Flower. VIII. Anecdote relative to Mr. Ross. IX. Anecdote of Mr. Henry. X. The artist's first historical picture. XI. Origin of his acquaintance with Dr. Smith of Philadelphia. XII. The friendship of Dr. Smith, and the character of the early companions of West. XIII. Anecdote of general Washington.

I. **I**N the course of a few days after the affair of the painting, Mr. Pennington paid another visit to Mr. West; and was so highly pleased with the effect of his present, and the promising talents of his young relation, that he entreated the old gentleman to allow Benjamin to accompany him for a few days to Philadelphia. This was cheerfully agreed to, and the artist felt himself almost as much delighted with the journey as with the box of colours. Every thing in the town filled him with astonishment; but the view of the

shipping, which was entirely new, particularly attracted his eye, and interested him like the imaginary spectacles of magic.

II. When the first emotions of his pleasure and wonder had subsided, he applied to Mr. Pennington to procure him materials for painting. That gentleman was desirous of getting possession of the first picture, and had only resigned what he jocularly alleged were his just claims, in consideration of the mother's feelings, and on being assured that the next picture should be purposely painted for him. The materials were procured, and the artist composed a landscape, which comprehended a picturesque view of a river, with vessels on the water, and cattle pasturing on the banks. While he was engaged in this picture, an incident occurred which, though trivial in itself, was so much in unison with the other circumstances that favoured the bent of his genius, that it ought not to be omitted.

III. Samuel Shœmaker,\* an intimate friend of Mr. Pennington, one of the principal merchants of Philadelphia, happened to meet in the street with one Williams, a painter, carrying home a picture. Struck by the beauty of the performance, he inquired if it was intended for sale, and being told that it was already disposed of, he ordered another to be painted for himself. When the painting was finished, he requested the artist to carry it to Mr. Pennington's house, in order that it might be shown to young West. It was very well executed, and the boy was so much astonished at the sight of it, that his emotion and surprise attracted the attention of Williams, who was a man of observation, and judged correctly in thinking that such an uncommon manifestation of sensibility in so young a boy, indicated something extraordinary in his character. He entered into conversation with him, and inquired if he had

\* This gentleman was afterwards introduced by Mr. West to the king, at Windsor, as one of the American loyalists.

read any books, or the lives of great men. The little amateur told him that he had read the Bible, and was well acquainted with the history of Adam, Joseph, David, Solomon, and the other great and good men whose actions are recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Williams was much pleased with the simplicity of the answer; and it might have occurred to him that histories more interesting have never been written, or written so well. Turning to Mr. Pennington, who was present, he asked if Benjamin was his son; advising him at the same time to indulge him in whatever might appear to be the bent of his talents, assuring him that he was no common boy.

This interview was afterwards much spoken of by Williams, who in the mean time lent him the works of Fresnoy and Richardson on painting, and invited him to see his pictures and drawings. The impression which these books made on the imagination of West finally decided his destination. He was allow-

ed to carry them with him into the country; and his father and mother, soon perceiving a great change in his conversation, were referred to the books for an explanation of the cause. They read them for the first time themselves, and treasuring in their minds those anecdotes of the indications of the early symptoms of talent with which both works abound, they remembered the prophetic injunction of Edmund Peckover.

IV. The effect of the enthusiasm inspired by Richardson and Fresnoy may be conceived from the following incident. Soon after the young artist had returned to Springfield, one of his schoolfellows, on a Saturday's half holiday, engaged him to give up a party at trap-ball to ride with him to one of the neighbouring plantations. At the time appointed the boy came, with the horse saddled. West inquired how he was to ride; "Behind me," said the boy; but Benjamin, full of the dignity of the profession to which he felt himself des-

tined, answered, that he never would ride behind any body. "O! very well then," said the good-natured boy, "you may take the saddle, and I will get up behind you." Thus mounted, they proceeded on their excursion; and the boy began to inform his companion that his father intended to send him to be an apprentice. "In what business?" inquired West; "a tailor," answered the boy. "Surely," said West, "you will never follow that trade;" animadverting upon its feminine character. The other, however, was a shrewd, sound-headed lad, and defended the election very stoutly, saying that his father had made choice of it for him, and that the person with whom he was to learn the business was much respected by all his neighbours. "But what do you intend to be, Benjamin?" West answered, that he had not thought at all on the subject, but he should like to be a painter. "A painter!" exclaimed the boy, "what sort of a trade is a painter? I never heard of such a thing." "A painter," said West, "is a com-

panion for kings and emperors." "Surely you are mad," replied the boy, "for there are no such people in America." "Very true," answered Benjamin, "but there are plenty in other parts of the world." The other, still more amazed at the apparent absurdity of this speech, reiterated in a tone of greater surprise, "you are surely quite mad." To this the enthusiast replied by asking him if he really intended to be a tailor. "Most certainly," answered the other. "Then you may ride by yourself, for I will no longer keep your company," said West, and, alighting, immediately returned home.

V. The report of this incident, with the affair of the picture, which had occasioned his absence from school, and visit to Philadelphia, made a great impression on the boys in the neighbourhood of Springfield. All their accustomed sports were neglected, and their play-hours devoted to drawing with chalk and oker. The little president was confessedly

the most expert among them, but he has often since declared, that, according to his recollection, many of his juvenile companions evinced a degree of taste and skill in this exercise, that would have done no discredit to the students of any regular academy.

VI. Not far from the residence of Mr. West a cabinet-maker had a shop, in which Benjamin sometimes amused himself with the tools of the workmen. One day several large and beautiful boards of poplar tree were brought to it; and he happening to observe that they would answer very well for drawing on, the owner gave him two or three of them for that purpose, and he drew figures and compositions on them with ink, chalk, and charcoal. Mr. Wayne, a gentleman of the neighbourhood, having soon after occasion to call at his father's, noticed the boards in the room, and was so much pleased with the drawings, that he begged the young artist to allow him to take two or three of them

home, which, as but little value was set on them, was thought no great favour, either by the painter or his father. Next day Mr. Wayne called again, and after complimenting Benjamin on his taste and proficiency, gave him a dollar for each of the boards which he had taken away, and was resolved to preserve. And doctor Jonathan Moris, another neighbour, soon after, also made him a present of a few dollars to buy materials to paint with. These were the first public patrons of the artist; and it is at his own request that their names are thus particularly inserted.

VII. About twelve months after the visit to Philadelphia, Mr. Flower, one of the justices of the county of Chester, who possessed some taste in painting, requested Mr. West to allow Benjamin to spend a few weeks at his house. A short time before, this gentleman had met with a severe domestic misfortune in the loss of a wife, to whom he was much at-

tached; and he resolved to show his respect to her memory by devoting his attention exclusively to the improvement of his children: for this purpose he had sent to England for a governess qualified to undertake the education of his daughters, and he had the good fortune to obtain a lady eminently fitted for the trust. She arrived a few days only before the young artist, and her natural discernment enabled her to appreciate that original bias of mind which she had heard ascribed to him, and of which she soon perceived the determination and the strength. Finding him unacquainted with any other books than the Bible, and the works of Richardson and Fresnoy, she frequently invited him to sit with her pupils, and, during the intervals of their tasks, she read to him the most striking and picturesque passages from translations of the ancient historians and poetry, of which Mr. Flower had a choice and extensive collection. It was from this intelligent woman that he heard, for the first time, of the Greeks and Romans; and the

impression which the story of those illustrious nations made on his mind, was answerable to her expectations.

VIII. Among the acquaintance of Mr. Flower was a Mr. Ross, a lawyer in the town of Lancaster, a place at that time remarkable for its wealth, and which had the reputation of possessing the best and most intelligent society to be then found in America. It was chiefly inhabited by Germans, who of all people in the practice of emigrating, carry along with them the greatest stock of knowledge and accomplishments. The society of Lancaster, therefore, though it could not boast of any very distinguished character, yet comprehended many individuals who were capable of appreciating the merit of essays in art, and of discriminating the rude efforts of real genius from the more complete productions of mere mechanical skill. It was exactly in such a place that such a youth as Benjamin West was likely to meet with that flattering atten-

tion which is the best stimulus of juvenile talent. The wife of Mr. Ross was greatly admired for her beauty, and she had several children who were so remarkable in this respect as to be objects of general notice. One day when Mr. Flower was dining with them, he advised his friend to have their portraits taken; and mentioned that they would be excellent subjects for young West. Application was in consequence made to old Mr. West, and permission obtained for the little artist to go to Lancaster for the purpose of taking the likenesses of Mrs. Ross and her family. Such was the success with which he executed this task, that the sphere of his celebrity was greatly enlarged; and so numerous were the applications for portraits, that it was with difficulty he could find time to satisfy the demands of his admirers.

IX. Among those who sent to him in this early stage of his career, was a person of the name of William Henry. He was an able me-

chanic, and had acquired a handsome fortune by his profession of a gunsmith. Henry was, indeed, in several respects, an extraordinary man, and possessed the power generally attendant upon genius under all circumstances, that of interesting the imagination of those with whom he conversed. On examining the young artist's performance, he observed to him, that, if he could paint as well, he would not waste his time on portraits, but would devote himself to historical subjects; and he mentioned the death of Socrates as affording one of the best topics for illustrating the moral effect of the art of painting. The painter knew nothing of the history of the philosopher; and, upon confessing his ignorance, Mr. Henry went to his library, and, taking down a volume of the English translation of Plutarch, read to him the account given by that writer of this affecting story.

X. The suggestion and description wrought upon the imagination of West, and

induced him to make a drawing, which he showed to Mr. Henry, who commended it as a perspicuous delineation of the probable circumstances of the event, and requested him to paint it. West said that he would be happy to undertake the task, but, having hitherto painted only faces and men clothed, he should be unable to do justice to the figure of the slave who presented the poison, and which he thought ought to be naked. Henry had among his workmen a very handsome young man, and, without waiting to answer the objection, he sent for him into the room. On his entrance he pointed him out to West, and said, "there is your model." The appearance of the young man, whose arms and breast were naked, instantaneously convinced the artist that he had only to look into nature for the models which would impart grace and energy to his delineation of forms.

XI. When the death of Socrates was finished, it attracted much attention, and led to

one of those fortunate acquaintances by which the subsequent career of the artist has been so happily facilitated. About this period the inhabitants of Lancaster had resolved to erect a public grammar-school; and doctor Smith, the provost of the college at Philadelphia, was invited by them to arrange the course of instruction, and to place the institution in the way best calculated to answer the intention of the founders. This gentleman was an excellent classical scholar, and combined with his knowledge and admiration of the merits of the ancients that liberality of respect for the endeavours of modern talent, with which the same kind of feeling is but rarely found connected. After seeing the picture and conversing with the artist, he offered to undertake to make him to a certain degree acquainted with classical literature; while at the same time he would give him such a sketch of the taste and character of the spirit of antiquity, as would have all the effect of the regular education

requisite to a painter. When this liberal proposal was communicated to old Mr. West, he readily agreed that Benjamin should go for some time to Philadelphia, in order to take advantage of the provost's instructions; and accordingly, after returning home for a few days, Benjamin went to the capital, and resided at the house of Mr. Clarkson, his brother-in-law, a gentleman who had been educated at Leyden, and was much respected for the intelligence of his conversation, and the propriety of his manners.

XII. Provost Smith introduced West, among other persons, to four young men, pupils of his own, whom he particularly recommended to his acquaintance, as possessing endowments of mind greatly superior to the common standard of mankind. One of these was Francis Hopkins, who afterwards highly distinguished himself in the early proceedings of the congress of the United States. Thomas Godfrey, the second, died after hav-

ing given the most promising indications of an elegant genius for pathetic and descriptive poetry. He was an apprentice to a watch-maker, and had secretly written a poem, which he published anonymously in the Philadelphia newspaper, under the title of the "Temple of Fame." The attention which it attracted, and the encomiums which the provost in particular bestowed on it, induced West, who was in the poet's confidence, to mention to him who was the author. The information excited the alert benevolence of Smith's character, and he lost no time until he had procured the release of Godfrey from his indenture, and a respectable employment for him in the government of the state; but this he did not live long to enjoy; being sent on some public business to Carolina, he fell a victim to the climate.

XIII. It is pleasant to redeem from oblivion the memory of early talent thus prematurely withdrawn from the world. Many

of Godfrey's verses were composed under a clump of pines which grew near the upper ferry of the river Schuylkill, to which spot he sometimes accompanied West and their mutual friends to angle. In the heat of the day he used to stretch himself beneath the shade of the trees, and repeat to them his verses as he composed them. Reid was the name of the other young man, and the same person who first opposed the British troops in their passing through Jersey, when the rebellion of the provinces commenced. Previous to the revolution, he was bred to the bar, and practised with distinction in the courts of Philadelphia. He was afterwards elected a member of congress, and is the same person who was appointed to meet lord Carlisle on his mission from the British court.

XIV. Provost Smith was himself possessed of a fluent vein of powerful eloquence, and it happened that many of his pupils who

distinguished themselves in the great struggle of their country, appeared to have imbibed his talent; but none of them more than Jacob Duché, another of the four youths whom he recommended to the artist. He became a clergyman, and was celebrated throughout the whole of the British provinces in America as a most pathetic and persuasive preacher. The publicity of his character in the world was, however, chiefly owing to a letter which he addressed to general Washington, soon after his appointment to the chief command of the army. The purport of this letter was to persuade the general to go over to the British cause. It was carried to him by a Mrs. Ferguson, a daughter of Doctor Graham, a Scottish physician in Philadelphia. Washington, with his army, at that time lay at Valley-forge, and this lady, on the pretext of paying him a visit, as they were previously acquainted, went to the camp. The general received her in his tent with much respect, for he greatly

admired the masculine vigour of her mind. When she had delivered the letter he read it attentively, and, rising from his seat, walked backwards and forwards upwards of an hour, without speaking. He appeared to be much agitated during the greatest part of the time; but at length, having decided with himself, he stopped, and addressed her in nearly the following words: "Madam, I have always esteemed your character and endowments, and I am fully sensible of the noble principles by which you are actuated on this occasion; nor has any man in the whole continent more confidence in the integrity of his friend, than I have in the honour of Mr. Duché. But I am here entrusted by the people of America with sovereign authority. They have placed their lives and fortunes at my disposal, because they believe me to be an honest man. Were I, therefore, to desert their cause, and consign them again to the British, what would be the consequence? to myself perpetual infamy; and to them endless

calamity. The seeds of everlasting division are sown between the two countries; and, were the British again to become our masters, they would have to maintain their dominion by force, and would, after all, retain us in subjection only so long as they could hold their bayonets to our breasts. No, Madam, the proposal of Mr. Duché, though conceived with the best intention, is not framed in wisdom. America and England must be separate states; but they may have common interests, for they are but one people. It will, therefore, be the object of my life and ambition to establish the independence of America in the first place; and in the second, to arrange such a community of interests between the two nations as shall indemnify them for the calamities which they now suffer, and form a new æra in the history of nations. But, Madam, you are aware that I have many enemies; congress may hear of your visit, and of this letter, and I should be suspected were I to conceal it

from them. I respect you truly, as I have said; and I esteem the probity and motives of Mr. Duché, and therefore you are free to depart from the camp, but the letter will be transmitted without delay to congress."

Mrs. Ferguson herself communicated the circumstances of this interesting transaction to Mr. West, after she came to England; for she, as well as Mr. Duché, were obliged to quit the country. It is painful to add, that Duché came to England, and was allowed to pine unnoticed by the government, and was heard of no more.

### CHAPTER III.

I. The course of instruction adopted by provost Smith. II. The artist led to the discovery of the camera. III. His father becomes anxious to place him in business. IV. Extraordinary proceedings of the quakers in consequence. V. The speech of Williamson the preacher in defence of the fine arts. VI. Magnanimous resolution of the quakers. VII. Reflections on this singular transaction.

I. **T**HERE was something so judicious in the plan of study which provost Smith had formed for his pupil, that it deserves to be particularly considered. He regarded him as destined to be a painter; and on this account did not impose upon him those grammatical exercises of language which are usually required from the young student of the classics, but directed his attention to those incidents which were likely to interest his fancy, and to furnish him at some future time with subjects for the easel. He carried him immediately to those passages of ancient history which make the most lasting impres-

sion on the imagination of the regular-bred scholar, and described the picturesque circumstances of the transactions with a minuteness of detail that would have been superfluous to a general student.

II. In the midst of this course of education, the artist happened to be taken ill of a slight fever, and when it had subsided, he was in so weak a state as to be obliged to keep his bed, and to have the room darkened. In this situation he remained several days, with no other light than what was admitted by the seams and fissures in the window shutters, which had the usual effect of expanding the pupil of his eyes to such a degree, that he could distinctly see every object in the room, which to others appeared in complete obscurity. While he was thus lying in bed, he observed the apparitional form of a white cow enter at the one side of the roof, and walking over the bed, gradually vanish at the other. The phenomenon surprised him

exceedingly, and he feared that his mind was impaired by his disease, which his sister also suspected, when on entering to inquire how he felt himself, he related to her what he had seen. Without, however, saying any thing, she went immediately and informed her husband, who accompanied her back to the apartment; and as they were standing near the bed, West repeated the story, exclaiming in his discourse that he saw, at the very moment in which he was then speaking, several little pigs running along the roof. This confirmed them in the apprehension of his delirium, and they sent for a physician. But the doctor could discover no symptoms of fever, the pulse was regular, the skin moist and cool, the thirst was abated, and indeed every thing about the patient indicated convalescence. Still the painter persisted in his story, and assured them that he then saw the figures of several of their mutual friends passing on the roof, over the bed; and that he even saw fowls pecking,

and the very stones of the street. All this seemed to them very extraordinary, for their eyes, not accustomed to the gloom of the chamber, could discern nothing, and the learned physician himself, in despite of the symptoms, began to suspect that the convalescent was really delirious. Prescribing, therefore, a composing mixture, which the painter submitted to swallow, he took his fee and leave, requesting Mrs. Clarkson and her husband to come away and not disturb the patient. After they had retired, curiosity overcame the influence of the drug, and the artist got up, determined to find out the cause of the strange apparitions which had so alarmed them all. In a short time he discovered a diagonal knot-hole in one of the window shutters, and upon placing his hand over it, the visionary paintings on the roof disappeared. This confirmed him in an opinion that he began to form, that there must be some simple natural cause for what he had seen; and, having thus

ascertained the way in which it acted, he called his sister and her husband into the room and explained it to them. When able to go down stairs, Mr. Clarkson gave him permission to perforate one of the parlour window shutters horizontally, in order to obtain a representation on the wall of the buildings of the opposite side of the street. The effect was as he expected, but, to his astonishment, the objects appeared inverted. Without attempting to remedy this with the aid of glasses, as a mathematical genius would perhaps have done, he was delighted to see in it the means of studying the pictorial appearance of nature, and he hailed the discovery as a revelation to promote his improvement in the art of painting. On his return soon after to his father's, he had a box made with one of the sides perforated; and, adverting to the reflective power of the mirror, he contrived, without ever having heard of the instrument, to invent the *Camera*. Thus furnishing another proof,

that although the faculty which enables a man to excel in any particular art or science is a natural endowment, it is seldom unaccompanied with a general superiority of observation. It will, however, not be disputed, that a boy under sixteen, who had thus, by the guidance of his own unassisted judgment, found out a method of ascertaining the colour and outline of natural objects as they should appear in painting, possessed no ordinary mind. Observations of this nature mark the difference between innate talent and instructed habits; and, whether in painting, or in poetry, in art, or in science, constitute the source of that peculiarity of intellect which is discriminated from the effects of education, by the name of original talent. The self-educated man of genius, when his mind is formed, differs but little in the method of expressing his notions, from the most mechanical disciple of the schools; but the process by which he attains that result, renders his history interesting by its

incidents, and valuable by the hints which it furnishes for the study of human character. It is, perhaps, also, one great cause of his own distinguishing features of mind, as the very contrivances to which he has recourse have the effect of taking, as it were, something extraneous into the matter of his experiments which tinges the product with curious and singular effects.—West, on afterwards mentioning his discovery to Williams the painter, was surprised to find himself anticipated, that artist having received a complete camera some time before from England.

III. In this favourable state of things he attained his sixteenth year, when his father became anxious to see him settled in some established business. For, though reluctant to thwart the bias of a genius at once so decided and original, and to which the injunction of Peckover had rendered him favourable and indulgent, the old gentleman

was sensible that the profession of a painter was not only precarious, but regarded by the religious association to which he belonged, as adverse to their tenets, by being only ornamental; and he was anxious, on his son's account and on his own, to avoid those animadversions to which he was exposed by the freedom he had hitherto granted to the predilections of Benjamin. He, therefore, consulted several of his neighbours on the subject; and a meeting of the society of friends in the vicinity was called, to consider, publicly, what ought to be the destiny of his son.

IV. The assembly met in the meeting-house near Springfield, and after much debate, approaching to altercation, a man of the name of John Williamson rose, and delivered a very extraordinary speech upon the subject. He was much respected by all present, for the purity and integrity of his life, and enjoyed great influence in his

sphere on account of the superiority of his natural wisdom, and, as a public preacher among the friends, possessed an astonishing gift of convincing eloquence. He pointed to old Mr. West and his wife, and expatiated on the blameless reputation which they had so long maintained, and merited so well. "They have had," said he, "ten children, whom they have carefully brought up in the fear of God, and in the christian religion; and the youth, whose lot in life we are now convened to consider, is Benjamin, their youngest child. It is known to you all that God is pleased, from time to time, to bestow upon some men extraordinary gifts of mind, and you need not be told by how wonderful an inspiration their son has been led to cultivate the art of painting. It is true that our tenets deny the utility of that art to mankind. But God has bestowed on the youth a genius for the art, and can we believe that Omniscience bestows his gifts but for great purposes? What God has given, who shall dare

to throw away? Let us not estimate almighty wisdom by our notions; let us not presume to arraign his judgment by our ignorance, but in the evident propensity of the young man, be assured that we see an impulse of the divine hand operating towards some high and beneficent end."

V. The effect of this argument, and the lofty commanding manner in which it was delivered, induced the assembly to agree that the artist should be allowed to indulge the predilections of his genius; and a private meeting of the friends was appointed to be holden at his father's house, at which the youth himself was requested to be present, in order to receive, in form, the assent and blessing of the society. On the day of meeting, the great room was put in order, and a numerous company of both sexes assembled. Benjamin was placed by his father, and the men and women took their respective forms on each side. After sitting some time in

silence, one of the women rose, and addressed the meeting on the wisdom of God, and the various occasions on which he selected from among his creatures the agents of his goodness. When she had concluded her exhortation, John Williamson also rose, and in a speech than which, perhaps, the porticos of Athens never resounded with a more impressive oratory, he resumed the topic which had been the subject of his former address. He began by observing that it was fixed as one of their indisputable maxims, that things merely ornamental were not necessary to the well-being of man, and that all superfluous things should be excluded from the usages and manners of their society. "In this proscription, we have included," said he, "the study of the fine arts, for we see them applied only to embellish pleasures, and to strengthen our inducements to gratify the senses at the expense of our immortal claims. But, because we have seen painting put to this

derogatory use, and have, in consequence, prohibited the cultivation of it among us, are we sure that it is not one of those gracious gifts which God has bestowed on the world, not to add to the sensual pleasures of man, but to facilitate his improvement as a social and a moral being? The fine arts are called the offspring and the emblems of peace. The christian religion itself is the doctrine of good will to man. Can those things which only prosper in peace be contrary to the christian religion? But, it is said, that the fine arts soften and emasculate the mind. In what way? Is it by withdrawing those who study them from the robust exercises which enable nations and people to make war with success? It is by lessening the disposition of mankind to destroy one another, and by taming the audacity of their animal fierceness? Is it for such a reason as this, that we who profess to live in unison and friendship, not only among ourselves, but with all the world—that we should object to the cultiva-

tion of the fine arts, of those arts which disarm the natural ferocity of man? We may as well be told that the doctrine of peace and life ought to be proscribed in the world because it is pernicious to the practice of war and slaughter, as that the arts which call on man to exercise his intellectual powers more than his physical strength, can be contrary to christianity, and adverse to the benevolence of the Deity. I speak not, however, of the fine arts as the means of amusement, nor the study of them as pastime to fill up the vacant hours of business, though even as such, the taste for them deserves to be regarded as a manifestation of divine favour, in as much as they dispose the heart to kind and gentle inclinations. For, I think them ordained by God for some great and holy purpose. Do we not know that the professors of the fine arts are commonly men greatly distinguished by special gifts of a creative and discerning spirit? If there be any thing in the usual course of human affairs

which exhibits the immediate interposition of the Deity, it is in the progress of the fine arts, in which it would appear he often raises up those great characters, the spirit of whose imaginations have an interminable influence on posterity, and who are themselves separated and elevated among the generality of mankind, by the name of men of genius. Can we believe that all this is not for some useful purpose? What that purpose is, ought we to pretend to investigate? Let us rather reflect that the almighty God has been pleased among us, and in this remote wilderness, to endow, with the rich gifts of a peculiar spirit, that youth who has now our common consent to cultivate his talents for an art, which, according to our humble and human judgment, was previously thought an unnecessary ministration to the sensual propensities of our nature. May it be demonstrated by the life and works of the artist, that the gift of God has not been bestowed on him in vain, nor the motives of the beneficent inspiration

which induces us to suspend our particular tenets, prove barren of religious or moral effect. On the contrary, let us confidently hope that this occurrence has been for good, and that the consequences which may arise in the society of this new world, from the example which Benjamin West will be enabled to give, will be such a love of the arts of peace as shall tend to draw the ties of affection closer, and diffuse over a wider extent of community the interests and blessing of fraternal love."

VI. At the conclusion of this address, the women rose and kissed the young Artist, and the men, one by one, laid their hands on his head and prayed that the Lord might verify in his life the value of the gift which had induced them, in despite of their religious tenets, to allow him to cultivate the faculties of his genius.

VII. The history of no other individual affords an incident so extraordinary. This could not be called a presentiment, but the result of a clear expectation, that some important consequence would ensue. It may be added that a more beautiful instance of liberality is not to be found in the records of any religious society. Hitherto, all sects, even of christians, were disposed to regard, with jealousy and hatred, all those members who embraced any pursuit that might tend to alienate them from their particular modes of discipline. The quakers have, therefore, the honour of having been the first to allow, by a public act, that their conception of the religious duties of man was liable to the errors of the human judgment, and was not to be maintained on the presumption of being actually according to the will of God. There is something at once simple and venerable in the humility with which they regarded their own peculiar principles, especially contrasted with the sublime view they appeared

to take of the wisdom and providence of the Deity. But, with whatever delightful feelings strangers and posterity may contemplate this beautiful example of christian magnanimity, it would be impossible to convey any idea of the sentiments with which it affected the youth who was the object of its exercise. He must have been less than man had he not endeavoured without ceasing, to attain an honourable eminence in his profession; or, had he forgotten, in the honours which he has since received from all polished nations, that he was authorized by his friends and his religion, to cultivate the art by which he obtained such distinctions, not for his own sake, but as an instrument chosen by Providence to disseminate the arts of peace in the world.

## CHAPTER IV.

I. Reflections on the eccentricities of young men of genius with respect to pecuniary matters. II. The death of the Artist's mother. III. The embodying of the Pennsylvania Militia; an anecdote of general Wayne. IV. The Artist elected commandant of a corps of Volunteer boys. V. The circumstances which occasioned the search for the bones of Braddock's army. VI. The search. VII. The discovery of the bones of the father and brother of sir Peter Halket. VIII. The Artist proposed afterwards to paint a picture of the discovery of the bones of the Halkets. IX. He commences regularly as a painter. X. He copies a St. Ignatius. XI. He is induced to attempt historical portraiture. XII. His picture of the trial of Susannah. XIII. Of the merits of that picture.

I. **T**HERE is a regardless independence about minds of superior endowment, which, in similar characters, manifests itself differently according to the circumstances in which they happen to be placed. Devoted to the contemplation of the means of future celebrity, the man of genius frequently finds himself little disposed to set a proper value on the common interests of life. When bred in affluence, and exempted from the

necessity of considering the importance of money to the attainment of his object, he is often found, to a blameful degree, negligent of pecuniary concerns; and, on the contrary, when his situation is such that he may only hope for distinction, by the practice of the most parsimonious frugality, he will as often appear in the social and propelling season of youth, enduring voluntary privations with an equanimity which the ostentatious fanatic or contrite penitent would in vain attempt to surpass. This peculiar feature of the self-sustained mind of genius, has often been misunderstood, and seldom valued as it ought to be. The presumptuous weak who mistake the wish of distinction for the workings of talent, admire the eccentricities of the gifted youth who is reared in opulence, and, mistaking the prodigality which is only the effect of his fortune, for the attributes of his talents, imitate his errors, and imagine that, by copying the blemishes of his conduct, they possess what is illustrious in his mind.

Such men are incapable of appreciating the self-denial which Benjamin West made it a duty to impose upon himself on entering the world; but those who are truly conscious of possessing the means of attracting the admiration of their contemporaries and posterity, the voluntary abstinence of a youth of genius will afford them delight in the contemplation, even though they may be happily free from the obligation of practising it themselves.

II. When it was determined among the friends that Benjamin West should be allowed to cultivate the art of painting, he went to Lancaster, but he was hastily recalled by a severe domestic misfortune. His mother was siezed by a dangerous illness, and being conscious that she could not live long, she requested that he might be sent for home. Benjamin hastily obeyed the summons, but, before he reached the house, her strength was exhausted, and she was only able to

express by her look the satisfaction with which she saw him approach the bed, before she expired. Her funeral, and the distress which the event naturally occasioned to her family, by all of whom she was very tenderly beloved, detained the young artist some time at his father's. About the end of August, in 1756, however, he took his final departure, and went to Philadelphia. But, before proceeding with the narrative of his professional career, it is necessary to advert to some of the public transactions of that period, by which his sensibility was powerfully excited. Indeed it will appear throughout the whole of these singular memoirs, that the subject of them was, perhaps, more immediately affected by the development of national events, than usually falls to the lot of any individual so little connected with public men, and so far remote from the great thoroughfare of political occurrences.

III. After the destruction of general Braddock's army, the Pennsylvanians being alar-

med at the defenceless state in which they were placed by that calamity, the assembly of the province resolved to embody a militia force; and Mr. Wayne, who has been already mentioned, was appointed colonel of the regiment raised in Chester county. This defensive measure announced that the golden age of the country was past, and the change felt by the peaceful quakers indicated an alteration in their harmless manners. West, among others, went to view the first muster of the troops under the command of colonel Wayne, and the sight of men in arms, their purpose and array, warmed his lively imagination with military enthusiasm. In conjunction with a son of the colonel, a boy of his own age, with whom he had become acquainted, he procured a gun, and determined also to be a soldier. Young Wayne was drilled by the disciplinarians of his father's corps, and he, in turn, exercised West, who, being more alert and active, soon obtained a decided superiority; but what different

destinies were attached to them! West has attained, in the intellectual discipline of the arts of peace, an enviable reputation; and Wayne, who was inferior to him in the manual of the soldier, became an illustrious commander, and partook, as the companion in arms of Washington, of the glory of having established the independence of America.

IV. The martial preparations inspired all the youths of Pennsylvania with the love of arms, and diffused the principles of that military spirit which was afterwards exerted with so much effect against the erroneous policy of the mother country. West, soon after his drilling under young Wayne, visited Lancaster; and the boys of that town having formed themselves into a little corps, made choice of him for their commandant. Among others who caught the spirit of the time, was his brother Samuel, who possessed a bold character and an enterprising disposi-

tion. He was about six years older than the artist, and, being appointed a captain in colonel Wayne's regiment, joined the troops under the command of general Forbes, who was sent to repair the disasters which had happened to the unfortunate Braddock.

V. After the taking of fort Du-Quesne, to which the new name of Pittsburg was given, in compliment to the minister of the day, general Forbes resolved to search for the relics of Braddock's army. As the European soldiers were not so well qualified to explore the forests, captain West was appointed, with his company of American sharpshooters, to assist in the execution of this duty; and a party of Indian warriors, who had returned to the British interests, were requested to conduct him to the places where the bones of the slain were likely to be found. In this solemn and affecting duty several officers belonging to the forty-second regiment accompanied the detachment, and with

them major sir Peter Halket, who had lost his father and a brother in the fatal destruction of the army. It might have been thought a hopeless task that he should be able to discriminate their remains from the common relics of the other soldiers; but he was induced to think otherwise, as one of the Indian warriors assured him that he had seen an officer fall near a remarkable tree, which he thought he could still discover; informing him at the same time, that the incident was impressed on his memory by observing a young subaltern, who, in running to the officer's assistance, was also shot dead on his reaching the spot, and fell across the other's body. The major had a mournful conviction in his own mind that the two officers were his father and brother, and, indeed, it was chiefly owing to his anxiety on the subject, that this pious expedition, the second of the kind that history records, was undertaken.

VI. Captain West and his companions proceeded through the woods and along the banks of the river towards the scene of the battle. The Indians regarded the expedition as a religious service, and guided the troops with awe, and in profound silence. The soldiers were affected with sentiments not less serious; and as they explored the bewildering labyrinths of those vast forests, their hearts were often melted with inexpressible sorrow; for they frequently found skeletons lying across the trunks of fallen trees, a mournful proof to their imaginations that the men who sat there, had perished of hunger, in vainly attempting to find their way to the plantations. Sometimes their feelings were raised to the utmost pitch of horror by the sight of skulls and bones scattered on the ground—a certain indication that the bodies had been devoured by wild beasts; and in other places they saw the blackness of ashes amidst the relics,—the tremendous evidence of atrocious rites.

VII. At length they reached a turn of the river not far from the principal scene of destruction, and the Indian who remembered the death of the two officers, stopped; the detachment also halted. He then looked around in quest of some object which might recall, distinctly, his recollection of the ground, and suddenly darted into the wood. The soldiers rested their arms without speaking. A shrill cry was soon after heard; and the other guides made signs for the troops to follow them towards the spot from which it came. In the course of a short time they reached the Indian warrior, who, by his cry, had announced to his companions that he had found the place where he was posted on the day of battle. As the troops approached, he pointed to the tree under which the officers had fallen. Captain West halted his men round the spot, and with sir Peter Halket and the other officers, formed a circle, while the Indians removed the leaves which thickly covered

the ground. The skeletons were found, as the Indian expected, lying across each other. The officers having looked at them some time, the major said, that as his father had an artificial tooth, he thought he might be able to ascertain if they were indeed his bones and those of his brother. The Indians were, therefore, ordered to remove the skeleton of the youth, and to bring to view that of the old officer. This was immediately done, and after a short examination, major Halket exclaimed, "It is my father!" and fell back into the arms of his companions. The pioneers then dug a grave, and the bones being laid in it together, a highland plaid was spread over them, and they were interred with the customary honours.

VIII. When lord Grosvenor bought the picture of the death of Wolfe, Mr. West mentioned to him the finding of the bones of Braddock's army as a pictorial subject capable of being managed with great effect.

The gloom of the vast forest, the naked and simple Indians supporting the skeletons, the grief of the son on recognising the relics of his father, the subdued melancholy of the spectators, and the picturesque garb of the Pennsylvanian sharpshooters, undoubtedly furnished topics capable of every effect which the pencil could bestow, or the imagination require in the treatment of so sublime a scene. His lordship admitted, that in possessing so affecting an incident as the discovery of the bones of the Halkets, it was superior even to that of the search for the remains of the army of Varus; the transaction, however, being little known, and not recorded by any historian, he thought it would not be interesting to the public. Other engagements have since prevented Mr. West from attempting it on his own account. But it is necessary that the regular narrative should be resumed; for the military history of the artist terminated when he was recalled home by the last illness of his mother,

although the excitement which the events that led to it occasioned never lost its influence on his mind, especially that of the incident which has been described, and which has ever been present to his imagination as one of the most affecting occurrences, whether considered with respect to the feelings of the gentlemen most immediately interested in it, or with respect to the wild and solemn circumstances under which the service was performed.

IX. On his return to Philadelphia, he again resided with Mr. Clarkson, his brother-in-law; and provost Smith, in the evenings, continued to direct his attention to those topics of literature which were most suitable to cherish the expansion of his mind, and to enrich his imagination with ideas useful to his profession. While his leisure hours were thus profitably employed, his reputation as a portrait painter was rapidly extended. His youth, and the peculiar incidents of his

history, attracted many sitters, and his merits verified the recommendations of his friends. This constancy of employment, no doubt materially tended to his improvement in the manipulation of his art; for, whatever may be the native force of talent, it is impossible that the possessor can attain excellence by any other means than practice. Facility to express the conceptions of the mind must be acquired before the pen or the pencil can embody them appropriately, and the author who does not execute much, however little he may exhibit, can never expect to do justice to the truth and beauty of his own ideas. West was very soon duly impressed with the justness of this observation; and, while in the execution of his portraits, he was assiduous to acquire a ready knowledge of those characteristic traits which have since enabled him to throw so much variety into his compositions; he felt conscious that, without seeing better pictures than his own, he could neither hope to attain distinction, nor

to appreciate his own peculiar powers. It was this consideration that induced him to adopt a most rigid system of frugality. He looked forward to a period when he might be enabled, by the fruits of his own industry, to visit the great scenes of the fine arts in Europe; and the care with which he treasured the money that he received for his portraits was rewarded even at the time with the assurance of realizing his expectations. The prices which he first fixed for his portraits, were two guineas and a half for a head, and five guineas for a half length.

X. After what has already been mentioned of the state of society in Pennsylvania, it is needless to say that at the period to which these memoirs refer, there were but few pictures in the British plantations; indeed, without any other explanation, all that should be contended for by any person who might imagine it necessary to advocate the pretensions of Benjamin West to be placed in the

list of original and self-instructed artists, would be readily granted, upon stating the single fact, that he was born in Pennsylvania, and did not leave America till the year 1760. At the same time, it might be construed into an injudicious concealment, if it were not mentioned, that governor Hamilton, who, at that period, presided with so much popularity over the affairs of the province, possessed a few pictures, consisting, however, chiefly of family portraits. Among them was a St. Ignatius, which was found in the course of the preceding war on board a Spanish prize, and which Mr. Pennington obtained leave for West to copy. The artist had made choice of it himself without being aware of its merits as a work of art, for it was not until several years after that he discovered it to be a fine piece of the Morillo school, and in the best style of the master.

XI. This copy was greatly admired by all who saw it, and by none more than his

valuable friend provost Smith, to whom it suggested the notion that portrait-painting might be raised to something greatly above the exhibition of a mere physical likeness; and he in consequence endeavoured to impress upon the mind of his pupil, that characteristic painting opened a new line in the art, only inferior in dignity to that of history, but requiring, perhaps, a nicer discriminative tact of mind. This judicious reflection of Dr. Smith was however anticipated by sir Joshua Reynolds, who had already made the discovery, and was carrying it into effect with admirable success. The provost, however, was unacquainted with that circumstance, and induced West to make an experiment by drawing his portrait in the style and attitude of the St. Ignatius.

XII. While he was thus employed on portraits, a gentleman of the name of Cox called on him to agree for a likeness of his daughter; and the picture of Dr. Smith attracted his

attention. It indeed appeared to him to evince such a capacity for historical composition, that, instead of then determining any thing respecting his daughter's portrait, he gave an order for an historical picture, allowing the artist himself to choose the subject. This task had peculiar charms; for the painter in the course of reading the Bible to his mother some time before, had been led to think that the trial of Susannah was a fine subject; and he was thus enabled, by the liberality of Mr. Cox, to embody the conceptions of his imagination while they were yet in all the freshness and vigour of original formation. He made his canvas about the size of a half length portrait, on which he introduced not fewer than forty figures. In the execution he followed the rule which he had adopted in painting the death of Socrates, and drew the principal figures from living models.—It is not known what has become of the trial of Susannah. In the rebellion of the colonies, Mr. Cox adhered

to the British interest; and his daughter, the last person into whose possession the picture has been traced, having married a British officer, came to England during the war, and the artist has not heard where she has since resided.

XIII. In point of composition, Mr. West is of opinion that the trial of Susannah was superior to the death of Socrates. In this he is probably correct; for, during the interval between the execution of the one and the other, his mind had been enlarged in knowledge by reading, his eye improved by the study of pictorial outline and perspective in the *camera*, and his touch softened by the portraits which he painted, and particularly by his careful copy of the St. Ignatius. In point of drawing, both pictures were no doubt greatly inferior to many of his subsequent works; but his son, long after he had acquired much celebrity, saw the picture of the death of Socrates, and was of opinion

that it was not surpassed by any of them in variety of composition, and in that perspicuity of narrative which is the grand characteristic of the artist's genius.

## CHAPTER V.

- I. Motives which induced him to visit New York. II. State of society in New York. III. Reflections on the sterility of American talent. IV. Considerations on the circumstances which tend to produce poetical feelings. V. The causes which produced the peculiarities in the state of society in New York. VI. The accident which led the artist to discover the method of colouring candle-light and fire effects after nature. VII. He copies Strange's engraving of Belisarius, by Salvator Rosa. VIII. The occurrence which hastened his voyage to Italy, with the anecdote of his obligations to Mr. Kelly. IX. Reflections on Plutarch, occasioned by reference to the effect which his works had on the mind of West. X. The artist embarks; occurrence at Gibraltar. XI. He arrives at Leghorn. XII. Journey to Rome.

I. **BUT** although West found himself in possession of abundant employment in Philadelphia, he was sensible that he could not expect to increase his prices with effect, if he continued constantly in the same place. He also became sensible that to view life in various lights was as necessary to his improvement as to exercise his pencil on different subjects. And, beyond all, he was profoundly sensible, by this time, that he

could not hope to attain eminence in his profession, without inspecting the great master-pieces of art in Europe, and comparing them with his own works in order to ascertain the extent of his powers. This philosophical view of his situation was doubtless partly owing to the excellent precepts of provost Smith, but mainly to his own just perception of what was necessary to the successful career of an artist: indeed the principle upon which the notion was formed is universal, and applies to all intellectual pursuits. Accordingly, impressed with these considerations, he frugally treasured the earnings of his pencil, that he might undertake, in the first place, a professional journey from Philadelphia, as preparatory to acquiring the means of afterwards visiting Europe, and particularly Rome. When he found that the state of his funds enabled him to undertake the journey, he went to New York.

II. The society of New York was much less intelligent in matters of taste and knowledge than that of Philadelphia. In the latter city the institutions of the college and library, and the strict moral and political respectability of the first settlers, had contributed to form a community, which, though inferior in the elegancies of living, and the etiquettes of intercourse, to what is commonly found in the European capitals, was little behind them in point of practical and historical information. Dr. Smith, the provost of the college, had largely contributed to elevate the taste, the sentiment and the topics of conversation in Philadelphia. He was full of the best spirit of antiquity, and there was a classical purity of mind and splendour of imagination sometimes met with in the families which he frequented, that would have done honour to the best periods of polished society.

III. It would be difficult to assign any reason why it has so happened that no

literary author of any general celebrity, with the exception of Franklin, has yet arisen in America. That men of learning and extensive reading, capable of vying with the same description of persons in Europe, are to be found in the United States, particularly in Philadelphia, is not to be denied; but of that class, whose talents tend to augment the stock of intellectual enjoyment in the world, no one, with the single exception already alluded to, has yet appeared.

IV. Poetry is the art of connecting ideas of sensible objects with moral sentiments; and without the previous existence of local feelings, there can be no poetry. America to the first European settlers had no objects interesting to the imagination, at least of the description thus strictly considered as poetical; for although the vigour and stupendous appearances of nature were calculated to fill the mind with awe, and to exalt the contemplations of enthusiasm, there was

nothing connected with the circumstances of the scene susceptible of that colouring from the memory, which gives to the ideas of local resemblance the peculiar qualities of poetry. The forests, though interminable, were but composed of trees; the mountains and rivers, though on a larger scale, were not associated in the mind with the exertions of patriotic valour, and the achievements of individual enterprise, like the Alps or the Danube, the Grampians or the Tweed. It is impossible to tread the depopulated and exhausted soil of Greece without meeting with innumerable relics and objects, which, like magical talismans, call up the genius of departed ages with the long-enriched roll of those great transactions, that, in their moral effect, have raised the nature of man, occasioning trains of reflection which want only the rhythm of language to be poetry. But in the unstoried solitudes of America, the traveller meets with nothing to awaken the sympathy of his recollective feelings. Even the very character

of the trees, though interesting to scientific research, chills, beneath the spaciousness of their shade, every poetical disposition. They bear little resemblance to those which the stranger has left behind in his native country. To the descendants of the first settlers, they wanted even the charm of those accidental associations which their appearance might have recalled to the minds of their father. Poetry is, doubtless, the first of the intellectual arts which mankind cultivate. In its earliest form it is the mode of expressing affection and admiration; but, before it can be invented, there must be objects beloved and admired, associated with things in nature endowed with a local habitation and a name. In America, therefore, although there has been no lack of clever versifiers, nor of men who have respectably echoed the ideas current in the old world, the country has produced nothing of any value descriptive of the peculiar associations connected with its scenery.

Among some of the Indian tribes a vein of original poetry has, indeed, been discovered; but the riches of the mine are unexplored, and the charge of sterility of fancy, which is made by the Europeans against the citizens of the United States, still remains unrefuted. Since the period, however, to which these memoirs chiefly refer, events of great importance have occurred, and the recollections connected with them, no doubt, tend to imbue the American climate with the elements of poetical thought; but they are of too recent occurrence for the purposes either of the epic or the tragic muse. The facts of history in America are still seen too much in detail for the imagination to combine them with her own creation. The fields of battle are almost too fresh for the farmer to break the surface; and years must elapse before the ploughshare shall turn up those eroded arms of which the sight will call into poetical existence the sad and dreadful incidents of the civil war.

V. In New York, Mr. West found the society wholly devoted to mercantile pursuits. A disposition to estimate the value of things, not by their utility or by their beauty, but by the price which they would bring in the market, almost universally prevailed. Mercantile men are habituated by the nature of their transactions to overlook the intrinsic qualities of the very commodities in which they deal; and though of all the community they are the most liberal and the most munificent, they set the least value on intellectual productions. The population of New York was formed of adventurers from all parts of Europe, who had come thither for the express purpose of making money, in order, afterwards, to appear with distinction at home. Although West, therefore, found in that city much employment in taking likenesses destined to be transmitted to relations and friends, he met with but few in whom he found any disposition congenial to his own; and the eleven months which he

passed there, in consequence, contributed less to the improvement of his mind than might have been expected from a city so flourishing. Still, the time was not altogether barren of occurrences which tended to advance his progress in his art, independent of the advantage arising from constant practice.

VI. He happened, during his residence there, to see a beautiful Flemish picture of a hermit praying before a lamp, and he was resolved to paint a companion to it, of a man reading by candle light. But before he discovered a method of producing, in day light, an effect on his model similar to what he wished to imitate, he was frequently baffled in his attempts. At length, he hit on the expedient of persuading his landlord to sit with an open book before a candle in a dark closet; and he found that, by looking in upon him from his study, the appearance was exactly what he wished for. In the

schools and academies of Europe, tradition has preserved the methods by which all the magical effects of light and shadow have been produced, with the exception, however, of Rembrandt's method, and which the author of these sketches ventures to suggest was attained, in general, by observing the effect of sunshine passing through chinks into a dark room. But the American artist was as yet unacquainted with any of them, and had no other guides to the essential principles of his art, but the delicacy of his sight, and that ingenious observation of nature to which allusion has been already so often made.

VII. The picture of the student, or man reading by candle light, was bought by a Mr. Myers, who, in the revolution, continued to adhere to the English cause. The same gentleman also bought a copy which West made about the same time of Belisarius, from the engraving by Strange, of Salvator

Rosa's painting. It is not known what has now become of these pictures; but when the artist long afterwards saw the original of Salvator Rosa, he was gratified to observe that he had instinctively coloured his copy almost as faithfully as if it had been painted from the picture instead of the engraving.

VIII. In the year 1759, the harvest in Italy fell far short of what was requisite for the ordinary consumption of the population, and a great dearth being foreseen, Messrs. Rutherford and Jackson, of Leghorn, a house of the first consequence then in the Mediterranean trade, and well known to all travellers for the hospitality of the partners, wrote to their correspondent Mr. Allen, at Philadelphia, to send them a cargo of wheat and flour. Mr. Allen was anxious that his son, before finally embarking in business, should see something of the world; and provost Smith, hearing his intention of sending him to Leghorn with the vessel, im-

mediately waited on the old gentleman, and begged him to allow West to accompany him, which was cheerfully acceded to, and the provost immediately wrote to his pupil at New York on the subject. In the mean time, West had heard that there was a vessel at Philadelphia loading for Italy, and had expressed to Mr. William Kelly, a merchant, who was then sitting to him for his portrait, a strong desire to avail himself of this opportunity to visit the fountain-head of the arts. Before this period, he had raised his terms for a half length to ten guineas, by which he acquired a sum of money adequate to the expenses of a short excursion to Italy. When he had finished Mr. Kelly's portrait, that gentleman, in paying him, requested that he would take charge of a letter to his agents in Philadelphia, and deliver it to them himself on his return to that city, which he was induced to do immediately, on receiving Dr. Smith's letter, informing him of the arrangement made with Mr. Allen.

When this letter was opened, an instance of delicate munificence appeared on the part of Mr. Kelly, which cannot be too highly applauded. It stated to the concern to which it was addressed, that it would be delivered by an ingenious young gentleman, who, he understood, intended to visit Rome for the purpose of studying the fine arts, and ordered them to pay him fifty guineas as a present from him towards furnishing his stores for the voyage.

IX. While waiting till the vessel was clear to sail, West had the gratification to see, in Philadelphia, his old friend Mr. Henry, for whom he had painted the death of Socrates. Towards him he always cherished the most grateful affection. He was the first who urged him to attempt historical composition; and, above all, he was the first who had made him acquainted with the magnanimous tales of Plutarch; perhaps, the greatest favour which could be conferred on a youthful mind, sus-

ceptible of impressions from the sublime and beautiful of human actions, which no author has better illustrated than that celebrated biographer, who may indeed be regarded, almost without hyperbole, as the recorder of ancient worth, and the tutor of modern genius. In his peculiar class, Plutarch still stands alone, at least no author in any of the living languages appears to be yet truly sensible of the secret cause by which his sketches give that direct impulse to the elements of genius, by which the vague and wandering feelings of unappropriated strength are converted into an uniform energy, endowed with productive action. Plutarch, like the sculptors of antiquity, has selected only the great and elegant traits of character; and hence his lives, like those statues which are the models of art, possess, with all that is graceful and noble in human nature, the particular features of individuals. He had no taste for the blemishes of mankind. His mind delighted in the contemplation of moral vigour; and

he seems justly to have thought that it was nearly allied to virtue: hence many of those characters whose portraitures in his works furnish the youthful mind with inspiring examples of true greatness, more authentic historians represent in a light far different. It is the aim of all dignified art to exalt the mind by exciting the feelings as well as the judgment; and the immortal lessons of Plutarch would never have awakened the first stirrings of ambition in the innumerable great men who date their career from reading his pages, had he been actuated by the minute and invidious spirit of modern biography. These reflections have occurred the more forcibly at this juncture, as the subject of this narrative was on the point of leaving a country in which were men destined to acquire glory in such achievements as Plutarch would have delighted to record; and of parting from early associates who afterwards attained a degree of eminence in the public service, that places them high in the roll of those

who have emulated the exploits and virtues of the heroes of that great biographer.

X. The artist having embarked with young Allen had a speedy and pleasant passage to Gibraltar; where, in consequence of the war then raging, the ship stopped for convoy. As soon as they came to anchor, commodore Carney and another officer came on board to examine the vessel's papers. It happened that some time before, the British government had, on account of political circumstances, prohibited the carrying of provisions into Italy, by which prohibition the ship and cargo would have been forfeited had she been arrested in attempting to enter an Italian port, or, indeed, in proceeding with such an intention. But captain Carney had scarcely taken his pen to write the replies to the questions which he put to the master, as to the owners of the vessel and her destination, when he again threw it down, and, looking the other officer full in the face, said, "I am

much affected by the situation in which I am now placed. This valuable ship is the property of some of my nearest relations, and the best friends that I have ever had in the world!" and he refrained from asking any more questions. There was, undoubtedly, much generosity in this conduct, for by the indulgence of the crown, all prizes taken in war became the property of the captors; and captain Carney, rather than enrich himself at the expense of his friends, chose to run the hazard of having his own conduct called in question for the non-performance of his official duty. It perhaps deserves also to be considered as affording a favourable example of that manly confidence in the gentlemanly honour of each other which has so long distinguished the British officers. On the mind of West it tended to confirm that agreeable impression by which so many previous incidents had made him cherish a liberal opinion of mankind. In other respects, captain Carney happening to be the officer who came on

board, was a fortunate circumstance; for on learning that young Allen was in the ship, he invited the passengers to dine on board his frigate; and the company, consisting of the governor, his staff, and principal officers in the garrison, tended to raise the consideration of the artist and his companion in the estimation of the fleet with which their vessel was to proceed to Leghorn. Indeed, throughout his whole life, Mr. West was, in this respect, singularly fortunate; for although the condescensions of rank do not in themselves confer any power on talent, they have the effect of producing that complacency of mind in those who are the objects of them, which is at once the reward and the solace of intellectual exertion, at the same time that they tend to mollify the spirit of contemporary invidiousness. The day after, the fleet sailed; and when they had passed the rock, the captains of the two men of war\* who

\* The two frigates, the Shannon, captain Meadow, since lord Manvers, whose intimacy still continues with Mr. West; and the Favourite sloop of war, captain Pownell.

had charge of the convoy, came on board the American, and invited Mr. Allen and Mr. West to take their passage in one of the frigates; this, however, they declined, but every day, when the weather was favourable, they were taken on board the one ship or the other, to dine; and when the weather did not permit this to be done with pleasure to the strangers, the officers sent them presents from their stock.

XI. After touching at several parts of the coast of Spain, the ship arrived safely at Leghorn, where mercantile inquiries detained Mr. Allen some time, and West being impatient to proceed to Rome, bade him adieu. Prior to his departure from Philadelphia, he had paid into the hands of old Mr. Allen the money which he thought would be requisite for his expenses in Italy, and had received from him a letter of credit on Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford. When they were made acquainted with the object of his voyage,

and heard his history, they showed him a degree of attention beyond even their general hospitality, and presented him with letters to cardinal Albani, and several of the most distinguished characters for erudition and taste in Rome; and as he was unacquainted with French or Italian, they recommended him to the care of a French courier, who had occasion to pass that way.

XII. When the travellers had reached the last stage of their journey, while their horses were baiting, West walked on alone. It was a beautiful morning; the air was perfectly placid, not a speck of vapour in the sky, and a profound tranquillity seemed almost sensibly diffused over the landscape. The appearance of nature was calculated to lighten and elevate the spirits; but the general silence and nakedness of the scene touched the feelings with solemnity approaching to awe. Filled with the idea of the metropolitan city, the artist hastened forward till he reached

an elevated part of the high road, which afforded him a view of a spacious campagna country, bounded by hills, and in the midst of it the sublime dome of St. Peter's. The magnificence of this view of the campagna excited, in his imagination, an agitated train of reflections that partook more of the nature of feeling than of thought. He looked for a spot to rest on, that he might contemplate at leisure a scene at once so noble and so interesting; and, near a pile of ruins fringed and trellised with ivy, he saw a stone that appeared to be part of a column. On going towards it, he perceived that it was a mile-stone, and that he was then only eight miles from the capitol. In looking before him, where every object seemed by the transparency of the Italian atmosphere to be brought nearer than it was in reality, he could not but reflect on the contrast between the circumstances of that view and the scenery of America; and his thoughts naturally adverted to the progress of civilization.

The sun seemed, to his fancy, the image of truth and knowledge, arising in the east, continuing to illuminate and adorn the whole earth, and withdrawing from the eyes of the old world to enlighten the uncultivated regions of the new. He thought of that remote antiquity when the site of Rome itself was covered with unexplored forests; and passing with a rapid reminiscence over her eventful story, he was touched with sorrow at the solitude of decay with which she appeared to be environed, till he adverted to the condition of his native country, and was cheered by the thought of the greatness which even the fate of Rome seemed to assure to America. For he reflected that, although the progress of knowledge appeared to intimate that there was some great cycle in human affairs, and that the procession of the arts and sciences from the east to the west demonstrated their course to be neither stationary nor retrograde; he could not but

rejoice, in contemplating the skeleton of the mighty capital before him, that they had improved as they advanced, and that the splendour which would precede their setting on the shores of Europe, would be the gorgeous omen of the glory which they would attain in their passage over America.

XIII. While he was rapt in these reflections, he heard the drowsy tinkle of a pastoral bell behind him, and on turning round, he saw a peasant dressed in shaggy skins, driving a few goats from the ruins. The appearance and physiognomy of this peasant struck him as something more wild and ferocious than any thing about the Indians; and, perhaps, the observation was correctly philosophical. In the Indian, nature is seen in that primitive vigour and simplicity, in which the actions are regulated by those feelings that are the elements of the virtues; but in the Italian bandit, for such he had

reason afterwards to think was the real character of the goat-herd, he saw man in that second state of barbarity, in which his actions are instigated by wants that have often a vicious origin.

## CHAPTER VI.

- I. State of the stationary society of Rome. II. Causes which rendered the city a delightful temporary residence. III. Defects of the academical methods of study. IV. His introduction to Mr. Robinson. V. Anecdote of cardinal Albani. VI. The cardinal's method of finding resemblances, and curious mistake of the Italians. VII. The artist's first visit to the works of art.

I. **DURING** the pontificate of pope Rezonico, the society of Rome had attained a pitch of elegance and a liberality of sentiment superior to that of any other city of Christendom. The theocratic nature of the government induced an exterior decorum in the public form of politeness, which, to strangers who took no interest in the abuses of the state, was so highly agreeable, that it tended even to appease their indignation against the laxity of private morals. If the traveller would forget that the name of Christianity was employed in supporting a baneful admi-

nistration to the vices, or could withdraw his thoughts from the penury and suffering which such an administration necessarily entailed on the people, he had opportunities of access at Rome to the most various and delightful exercises of the faculties of memory, taste, and judgment, in the company of persons distinguished for their knowledge and genius. For, with all the social intercourse for which Paris was celebrated in the reign of Louis XV. the local objects at Rome gave a higher and richer tone to conversation there; even the living vices were there less offensive than at Paris, the rumours of them being almost lost in the remembrance of departed virtue, constantly kept awake by the sight of its monuments and vouchers. Tyranny in Rome was exercised more intellectually than in the French capital. Injustice and oppression were used more in the form of persuasion; and though the crosier was not less pernicious than the bayonet, it inflicted a less irritating injury.

The virtuous endured with patience the wrongs that their misguided judgment led them to believe were salutary to their eternal welfare. But it ought to be observed, that the immorality of the Romans was greatly exaggerated. Individuals redeemed by their merits the reproach of universal profligacy; and strangers, by being on their guard against the moral contagion, suffered a less dangerous taint than in the atheistical coteries of Paris. Many, in consequence, who came prepared to be disgusted with the degenerated Romans, often bade them adieu with sentiments of respect, and remembered their urbanity and accomplishments with delightful satisfaction.

II. It was not, however, the native inhabitants of Rome who constituted the chief attractions of society there, but the number of accomplished strangers of all countries and religions, who, in constant succession, came in pilgrimage to the shrine of antiquity; and who, by the contemplation of the merits

and glories of departed worth, often felt themselves, as it were, miraculously endowed with new qualities. The collision of minds fraught with learning, in that high state of excitement which the genius of the place produced on the coldest imaginations, together with those innumerable brilliant and transitory topics which were never elicited in any other city, made the Roman conversations a continual exercise of the understanding. The details of political intrigue, and the follies of individuals, excited but little interest among the strangers in Rome. It seemed as if by an universal tacit resolution, national and personal peculiarities and prejudices were forgotten, and that all strangers simultaneously turned their attention to the transactions and affairs of former ages, and of statesmen and authors now no more. Their mornings were spent in surveying the monuments raised to public virtue, and in giving local features in their minds to the knowledge which they had

acquired by the perusal of those works that have perpetuated the dignity of the Roman character. Their evenings were often allotted to the comparison of their respective conjectures, and to ascertain the authenticity and history of the relics which they had collected of ancient art. Sometimes the day was consumed in the study of those inestimable ornaments of religion, by which the fraudulent disposition of the priesthood had, in the decay of its power, rendered itself venerable to the most enlightened minds; and the night was devoted to the consideration of the causes which contribute to the development of genius, or of the events which tend to stifle and overwhelm its powers. Every recreation of the stranger in Rome was an effort of the memory, of abstraction, and of fancy.—Society, in this elevated state of enjoyment, surrounded by the greatest works of human creation, and placed amidst the monuments of the most illustrious of mankind, and that of the quakers

of Pennsylvania, employed in the mechanical industry of felling timber, and amid the sobriety of rural and commercial economy, were like the extremes of a long series of events, in which, though the former is the necessary consequence of the latter, no resemblance can be traced in their respective characteristics. In America all was young, vigorous, and growing,—the spring of a nation, frugal, active, and simple. In Rome all was old, infirm, and decaying,—the autumn of a people who had gathered their glory, and were sinking into sleep under the disgraceful excesses of the vintage. On the most inert mind, passing from the one continent to the other, the contrast was sufficient to excite great emotion; on such a character as that of Mr. West, who was naturally disposed to the contemplation of the sublime and beautiful, both as to their moral and visible effect, it made a deep and indelible impression. It confirmed him in the wisdom of those strict religious principles

which denied the utility of art when solely employed as the medium of amusement; and impelled him to attempt what could be done to approximate the uses of the pencil to those of the pen, in order to render painting, indeed, the sister of eloquence and poetry.

III. But the course of study in the Roman schools was not calculated to enable him to carry this grand purpose into effect; for the principles by which Michael Angelo, and Raphael had attained their excellence, were no longer regarded. The study of nature was deserted for that of the antique; and pictures were composed according to rules derived from other paintings, without respect to what the subject required, or what the circumstances of the scene probably appeared to be. It was, therefore, not one of the least happy occurrences in his life that he went to Rome when society was not only in the most favourable state for the improve-

ment of his mind, and for convincing him of the deleterious influence of the arts when employed as the embellishments of voluptuousness and luxury; but also when the state of the arts was so mean, that the full effect of studying the antique only, and of grouping characters by academical rules, should appear so striking as to satisfy him that he could never hope for any eminence, if he did not attend more to the phenomena of nature, than to the productions of the greatest genius. The perusal of the works of other painters, he was sensible, would improve his taste; but he was convinced, that the design which he had formed for establishing his own fame, could not be realised, if, for a single moment, he forgot that their works, however exquisite, were but the imitations and forms of those eternal models to which he had been instinctively directed.

IV. It was on the 10th of July, 1760, that he arrived at Rome. The French courier

conducted him to a hotel, and, having mentioned in the house that he was an American, and a quaker, come to study the fine arts, the circumstance seemed so extraordinary, that it reached the ears of Mr. Robinson, afterwards lord Grantham, who immediately found himself possessed by an irresistible desire to see him; and who, before he had time to dress or refresh himself, paid him a visit, and insisted that he should dine with him. In the course of dinner, that gentleman inquired what letters of introduction the artist had brought with him; and West having informed him, he observed it was somewhat remarkable that the whole of them should be addressed to his most particular friends, adding, that as he was engaged to meet them at a party in the evening, he expected West would accompany him. This attention and frankness was acknowledged as it deserved to be, and is remembered by the artist among those fortunate incidents which have rendered the recollection of his

past life so pleasant, as scarcely to leave a wish for any part of it to have been spent otherwise than it was. At the hour appointed, Mr. Robinson conducted him to the house of Mr. Crispigné, an English gentleman who had long resided at Rome, where the evening party was held.

V. Among the distinguished persons whom Mr. West found in the company, was the celebrated cardinal Albani. His eminence, although quite blind, had acquired, by the exquisite delicacy of his touch, and the combining powers of his mind, such a sense of ancient beauty, that he excelled all the virtuosi then in Rome, in the correctness of his knowledge of the verity and peculiarities of the smallest medals and intaglios. Mr. Robinson conducted the artist to the inner apartment, where the cardinal was sitting, and said, "I have the honour to present a young American, who has a letter of introduction to your eminence, and who has

come to Italy for the purpose of studying the fine arts." The cardinal fancying that the American must be an Indian, exclaimed, "Is he black or white?" and on being told that he was very fair, "What as fair as I am?" cried the cardinal still more surprised. This latter expression excited a good deal of mirth at the cardinal's expense, for his complexion was of the darkest Italian olive, and West's was even of more than the usual degree of English fairness. For some time after, if it be not still in use, the expression of "as fair as the cardinal" acquired proverbial currency in the Roman conversations, applied to persons who had any inordinate conceit of their own beauty.

VI. The cardinal, after some other short questions, invited West to come near him, and running his hands over his features, still more attracted the attention of the company to the stranger, by the admiration which he expressed at the form of his head. This

occasioned inquiries respecting the youth; and the Italians concluding that, as he was an American, he must, of course, have received the education of a savage, became curious to witness the effect which the works of art in the Belvidere and Vatican would produce on him. The whole company, which consisted of the principal Roman nobility, and strangers of distinction then in Rome, were interested in the event; and it was arranged in the course of the evening, that on the following morning they should accompany Mr. Robinson and his protégé to the palaces.

VII. At the hour appointed, the company assembled; and a procession, consisting of upwards of thirty of the most magnificent equipages in the capital of Christendom, and filled with some of the most erudite characters in Europe, conducted the young quaker to view the master-pieces of art. It was agreed that the Apollo should be first sub-

mitted to his view, because it was the most perfect work among all the ornaments of Rome; and, consequently, the best calculated to produce that effect which the company were anxious to witness. The statue then stood in a case, enclosed with doors, which could be so opened as to disclose it at once to full view. West was placed in the situation where it was seen to the most advantage, and the spectators arranged themselves on each side. When the keeper threw open the doors, the artist felt himself surprised with a sudden recollection altogether different from the gratification which he had expected; and without being aware of the force of what he said, exclaimed, "My God, how like it is to a young Mohawk warrior!" The Italians, observing his surprise, and hearing the exclamation, requested Mr. Robinson to translate to them what he said; and they were excessively mortified to find that the god of their idolatry was compared to a savage. Mr. Robinson mentioned to West

their chagrin, and asked him to give some more distinct explanation, by informing him what sort of people the Mohawk Indians were. He described to him their education; their dexterity with the bow and arrow; the admirable elasticity of their limbs; and how much their active life expands the chest, while the quick breathing of their speed in the chase, dilates the nostrils with that apparent consciousness of vigour which is so nobly depicted in the Apollo. "I have seen them often," added he, "standing in that very attitude, and pursuing, with an intense eye, the arrow which they had just discharged from the bow." This descriptive explanation did not lose by Mr. Robinson's translation. The Italians were delighted, and allowed that a better criticism had rarely been pronounced on the merits of the statue. The view of the other great works did not awaken the same vivid feelings. Those of Raphael, in the Vatican, did not at first particularly interest him; nor was it until he

had often visited them alone, and studied them by himself, that he could appreciate the fulness of their excellence. His first view of the works of Michael Angelo, was still less satisfactory: indeed, he continued always to think, that, with the single exception of the Moses, that artist had not succeeded in giving a probable character to any of his subjects, notwithstanding the masterly hand and mind which pervade the weakest of his productions.

VIII. Among the first objects which particularly interested Mr. West, and which he never ceased to revisit day after day with increasing pleasure, were the celebrated statues ascribed to Phidias, on the Monte Cavallo. The action of the human figure appeared to him so majestic, that it seemed to throw, as it were, a visible kind of awe into the very atmosphere, and over all the surrounding buildings. But the smallness of the horse struck him as exceedingly pre-

posteros. He had often examined it before the idea occurred to him that it was probably reduced according to some unknown principle of ancient art; and in this notion he was confirmed, by observing something of the same kind in the relative proportion of human figures and animals, on the different gems and bas-reliefs to which his attention was subsequently directed. The ancient sculptors uniformly seemed to consider the human figure as the chief object, and sacrificed, to give it effect, the proportions of inferior parts. The author of the group on the Monte Cavallo, in the opinion of Mr. West, represented the horse smaller than the natural size, in order to augment the grandeur of the man. How far this notion, as the principle of a rule, may be sound, it would be unnecessary, perhaps impertinent, to inquire here; but its justness as applicable to the sculptures of antiquity, is abundantly verified by the bas-reliefs brought from the Parthenon of Athens. It is, indeed, so ad-

mitted a feature of ancient art, as to be regarded by some critics, as having for its object the same effect in sculpture, which is attained by light and shadow in painting. In a picture, the artist, by a judicious obscurity, so veils the magnitude of the car in which he places a victor, that, notwithstanding its size, it may not appear the principal object; but this artifice is denied to the sculptor, who is necessitated to diminish the size of those things which are of least importance, in order to give dignity to the dominant figures. Raphael, in making the boat so small in the miraculous draught of fishes, is thought to have injudiciously applied this rule of ancient sculpture; for he ought to have accomplished, by foreshortening, the same effect which he meant to produce by diminishing the size. It should however, be observed, that great doubts are entertained if the statues on the Monte Cavallo were originally integral parts of the same group; but although this doubt

may be well founded, it will not invalidate the supposed general principle of the ancient sculptors, corroborated, as it is, by innumerable examples.

IX. In the evening, after visiting the palaces, Mr. Robinson carried Mr. West to see a grand religious ceremony in one of the churches. Hitherto he was acquainted only with the simple worship of the quakers. The pomp of the papal ceremonies was as much beyond his comprehension, as the overpowering excellence of the music surpassed his utmost expectations. Undoubtedly, in all the spectacles and amusements of Rome, he possessed a keener sense of enjoyment, arising from the simplicity of his education, than most other travellers. That same sensibility to the beauty of forms and colours which had awakened his genius for painting, was, probably, accompanied with a general superior susceptibility of the other organs as well as the sight; for it is observed

that a taste for any one of the fine arts is connected with a general predilection for them all. But neither the Apollo, the Vatican, nor the pomp of the catholic ritual, excited his feelings to so great a degree as the spectacle which presented itself to his view around the portico of the church. Bred in the universal prosperity of Pennsylvania, where the benevolence of the human bosom was only employed in the acts of hospitality and mutual kindness, he had never witnessed any spectacle of beggary, nor had he ever heard the name of God uttered to second an entreaty for alms. Here, however, all the lazars and the wretched in Rome were collected together; hundreds of young and old in that extreme of squalor, nakedness, and disease, which affrights the English traveller in Italy, were seen on all sides; and their importunities and cries, for the love of God, and the mercy of Christ, to relieve them, thrilled in his ears, and smote upon his heart to such a degree, that his joints became as it were

loosened, and his legs scarcely able to support him. Many of the beggars knew Mr. Robinson, and seeing him accompanied by a stranger, an Englishman, as they concluded the artist to be from his appearance, surrounded them with confidence and clamours.

X. As they returned from the church, a woman somewhat advanced in life, and of a better appearance than the generality of the beggars, followed them, and Mr. West gave her a small piece of copper money, the first Roman coin which he had received in change, the relative value of which to the other coins of the country was unknown to him. Shortly afterwards they were joined by some of the Italians, whom they had seen in the morning, and while they were conversing together, he felt some one pull his coat, and turned round. It was the poor woman to whom he had given the piece of copper money. She held out in her hand several smaller pieces,

and as he did not understand her language, he concluded that she was chiding him for having given her such a trifle, and coloured deeply with the idea. His English friend, observing his confusion, inquired what he had given her, and he answered that he did not know, but it was a piece of money, which he had received in change. Robinson, after a short conversation with the beggar, told Mr. West, that she had asked him to give her a farthing, "But as you gave her a two-penny-piece," said he, "she has brought you the change." This instance of humble honesty, contrasted with the awful mass of misery with which it was united, gave him a favourable idea of the latent sentiments of the Italians. How much, indeed, is the character of that people traduced by the rest of Europe! How often is the traveller in Italy, when he dreads the approach of robbers, and prepares against murder, surprised at the bountiful disposition of the common

Italians, and made to blush at having applied the charges against a few criminals to the character of a whole people—without reflecting that the nation is only weak because it is subdivided.

## CHAPTER VII.

I. Anecdote of a famous improvisatore. II. West the subject of one of his finest effusions. III. Anecdote of cardinal Albani. IV. West introduced to Mengs. V. Satisfactory result of West's first essay in Rome. VI. Consequence of the continual excitement which the artist's feelings endured. VII. He goes to Florence for advice. VIII. He accompanies Mr. Matthews in a tour. IX. Singular instance of liberality towards the artist from several gentlemen of Philadelphia.

I. **IT** was not, however, the novelty, variety, and magnificence of the works of art and antiquity in Rome, that kept Mr. West in a constant state of high excitement; the vast difference in the manners of the people from those of the inhabitants of America, acted also as an incessant stimulus on his feelings and imagination: even that difference, great as it happened to be, was rendered particularly interesting to him by incidents arising out of his own peculiar situation. One night, soon after his arrival in Rome, Mr.

Gavin Hamilton, the painter, to whom he had been introduced by Mr. Robinson, took him to a coffee-house, the usual resort of the British travellers. While they were sitting at one of the tables, a venerable old man, with a guitar suspended from his shoulder, entered the room, and coming immediately to their table, Mr. Hamilton addressed him by the name of Homer. He was the most celebrated improvisatore in all Italy, and the richness of expression, and nobleness of conception which he displayed in his effusions, had obtained for him that distinguished name. Those who once heard his poetry, never ceased to lament that it was lost in the same moment, affirming, that it often was so regular and dignified, as to equal the finest compositions of Tasso and Ariosto. It will, perhaps, afford some gratification to the admirers of native genius to learn, that this old man, though led by the fine frenzy of his imagination to prefer a wild and wandering life to the offer of a settled

independence, which had been often made to him in his youth, enjoyed in his old age, by the liberality of several Englishmen, who had raised a subscription for the purpose, a small pension, sufficient to keep him comfortable in his own way, when he became incapable of amusing the public.

II. After some conversation, Homer requested Mr. Hamilton to give him a subject for a poem. In the mean time, a number of Italians had gathered round them to look at West, who they had heard was an American, and whom, like cardinal Albani, they imagined to be an Indian. Some of them, on hearing Homer's request, observed, that he had exhausted his vein, and had had already said and sung every subject over and over. Mr. Hamilton, however, remarked that he thought he could propose something new to the bard, and pointing to Mr. West, said, that he was an American come to study the fine arts in Rome; and

that such an event furnished a new and magnificent theme. Homer took possession of the thought with the ardour of inspiration. He immediately unslung his guitar, and began to draw his fingers rapidly over the strings, swinging his body from side to side, and striking fine and impressive chords. When he had thus brought his motions and his feelings into unison with the instrument, he began an extemporaneous ode in a manner so dignified, so pathetic, and so enthusiastic, that Mr. West was scarcely less interested by his appearance than those who enjoyed the subject and melody of his numbers. He sung the darkness which for so many ages veiled America from the eyes of science. He described the fulness of time, when the purposes for which it had been raised from the deep were to be manifested. He painted the seraph of knowledge descending from heaven, and directing Columbus to undertake the discovery; and he related the leading incidents of the voyage. He invoked the

fancy of his auditors to contemplate the wild magnificence of mountain, lake, and wood, in the new world; and he raised, as it were, in vivid perspective, the Indians in the chase, and at their horrible sacrifices. "But," he exclaimed, "the beneficent spirit of improvement is ever on the wing, and, like the ray from the throne of God which inspired the conception of the virgin, it has descended on this youth, and the hope which ushered in its new miracle, like the star that guided the magi to Bethlehem, has led him to Rome. Methinks I behold in him an instrument chosen by heaven, to raise in America the taste for those arts which elevate the nature of man,—an assurance that his country will afford a refuge to science and knowledge, when in the old age of Europe they shall have forsaken her shores. But all things of heavenly origin, like the glorious sun, move westward; and truth and art have their periods of shining, and of night. Rejoice then, O venerable Rome, in thy divine destiny; for

though darkness overshadow thy seats, and though thy mitred head must descend into the dust, as deep as the earth that now covers thy ancient helmet and imperial diadem, thy spirit, immortal and undecayed, already spreads towards a new world, where, like the soul of man in paradise, it will be perfected in virtue and beauty more and more."

The highest efforts of the greatest actors, even of Garrick himself delivering the poetry of Shakspeare, never produced a more immediate and inspiring effect than this rapid burst of genius. When the applause had abated, Mr. West being the stranger, and the party addressed, according to the common practice, made the bard a present. Mr. Hamilton explained the subject of the ode: though with the weakness of a verbal translation, and the imperfection of an indistinct echo, it was so connected with the appearance which the author made in the recital, that the incident has never been obliterated from Mr. West's recollection.

III. While the artist was gratifying himself with a cursory view of the works of art, and of the curiosities, Mr. Hope, of Amsterdam, the father of the gentlemen who have since become so well known in London for their taste in the arts, and their superb collections of pictures and marbles, arrived in Rome. Mr. West being introduced to him, accompanied him to cardinal Albani, to whom he had letters of introduction, and witnessed a proof of the peculiar skill of his eminence. The cardinal requested Mr. Hope to come near him, and according to his usual custom with strangers, drew his hands over his face, observing that he was a German. In doing the same thing to Mr. West, he recognised him as the young American.

IV. At this time Mengs was in the zenith of his popularity, and West was introduced to him at the cardinal's villa. He appeared to be as much struck as every other person, with the extraordinary circumstance of an

American coming to study the fine arts; and begged that Mr. West would show him a specimen of his proficiency in drawing. In returning home, our artist mentioned to Mr. Robinson that as he had never learnt to draw, he could not produce any sketch like those made by the other students; but that he could paint a little, and if Mr. Robinson would take the trouble to sit, he would execute his portrait to show Mengs. The proposal was readily acceded to, and it was also agreed, that except to two of their most intimate acquaintances, the undertaking should be kept a profound secret. When the picture was finished, it was so advantageous to the artist, that it tended to confirm the opinion which was entertained of his powers, founded only on the strength of the curiosity which had brought him from America. But, before showing it to Mengs, it was resolved that the taste and judgment of the public, with respect to its merits, should be ascertained.

V. Mr. Crespigné, one of the two friends in the secret, lived as a Roman gentleman, and twice a year gave a grand assembly at his house, to which all the nobility and strangers in Rome, the most eminent for rank, birth, and talents, were invited. It was agreed that the portrait should be exhibited at one of his parties, which happened to take place soon after it was finished. A suitable frame being provided, the painting was hung up in one of the rooms. The first guests who arrived, were amateurs and artists; and as it was known among them that Robinson was sitting to Mengs for his portrait, it was at once thought to be that picture, and they agreed that they had never seen any painting of the artist so well coloured. As the guests assembled, the portrait became more and more the subject of attention, and Mr. West sat behind on a sofa equally agitated and delighted by their strictures, which Mr. Robinson reported to him from time to time. In the course of the

evening Mr. Dance, an Englishman of great shrewdness, was observed looking with an eye of more than common scrutiny at the portrait, by Mr. Jenkins, another of the guests, who, congratulating Robinson in getting so good a portrait from Mengs, turned to Dance, and said, "That he must now acknowledge that Mengs could colour as well as he could draw." Dance confessed that he thought the picture much better coloured than those usually painted by Mengs, but added that he did not think the drawing either so firm or so good as the usual style of that artist. This remark occasioned some debate, in which Jenkins, attributing the strictures of Dance to some prejudice which he had early conceived against Mengs, drew the company around to take a part in the discussion. Mr. Crespigné seizing the proper moment in their conversation to produce the effect intended, said to Jenkins that he was mistaken, and that Dance was in the right, for, in truth, the picture was not painted by

Mengs. "By whom then," vociferated every one, "for there is no other painter now in Rome capable of executing any thing so good?" "By that young gentleman there," said Mr. Crespigné, turning to West. At once all eyes were bent towards him, and the Italians, in their way, ran and embraced him. Thus did the best judges at once, by this picture, acknowledge him as only second in the executive department of the art to the first painter then in Rome. Mengs himself, on seeing the picture, expressed his opinion in terms that did great honour to his liberality, and gave the artist an advice which he never forgot, nor remembered without gratitude. He told him that the portrait showed that he had no occasion to learn to paint at Rome. "You have already, sir," said he, "the mechanical part of your art: what I would, therefore, recommend to you, is to see and examine every thing deserving of your attention here, and after making a few drawings of about half a dozen of the best

statues, go to Florence, and observe what has been done for art in the collections there. Then proceed to Bologna, and study the works of the Caracci; afterwards visit Parma, and examine, attentively, the pictures of Corregio; and then go to Venice and view the productions of Tintoretti, Titian, and Paul Veronese. When you have made this tour, come back to Rome, and paint an historical composition to be exhibited to the Roman public; and the opinion which will then be formed of your talents should determine the line of our profession which you ought to follow." This judicious advice, so different from those absurd academical dogmas which would confine genius to the looking only to the works of art, for that perfection which they but dimly reflect from nature, West found accord so well with his own reflections and principles, that he resolved to follow it with care and attention. But the thought of being in Rome, and the constant excitement arising from extraordi-

nary and interesting objects, so affected his mind, accustomed to the sober and uniform habits of the quakers, that sleep deserted his pillow, and he became ill and constantly feverish. The public took an interest in his situation. A consultation of the best physicians in Rome was held on his case, the result of which was a formal communication to Mr. Robinson, that his friend must immediately quit the capital, and seek relief from the irritated state of his sensibility in quiet and retirement. Accordingly, on the 20th of August he returned to Leghorn.

VI. Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford, by whose most friendly recommendations he had obtained so much flattering distinction at Rome, received him into their own house, and treated him with a degree of hospitality that merits for them the honour of being considered among the number of his early patrons. Mr. (afterwards sir John) Dick, then the British consul at Leghorn, and his

lady, also treated him with great partiality, and procured for him the use of the imperial baths. His mind being thus relieved from the restless ecstasy which he had suffered in Rome, and the intensity of interest being diminished by the circumscribed nature of the society of Leghorn, together with the bracing effects of sea-bathing, he was soon again in a condition to resume his study in the capital. But the same overpowering attacks on his feelings and imagination soon produced a relapse of his former indisposition, and compelled him to return to Leghorn, where he was again speedily cured of his fever, but it left in its dregs a painful affection in the ankle, that threatened the loss of the limb. The well-known Nanoni, an eminent surgeon, who had introduced many improvements in the treatment of diseased joints, was at this period resident in Florence, and Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford wrote to sir Horace Mann, then the British minister at the ducal

court, to consult him relative to the case of Mr. West: his answer induced them to advise the artist to go to Florence. After a painful period of eleven months confinement to his couch and chamber, he was perfectly and radically cured.

VII. A state of pain and disease is adverse to mental improvement; but there were intervals in which Mr. West felt his anguish abate, and in which he could not only participate in the conversation of the gentlemen to whose kindness he had been recommended, but was able, occasionally, to exercise his pencil. The testimonies of friendship which he received at this period from sir Horace Mann, the marquisses of Creni and Riccardi, the late lord Cooper, and many others of the British nobility, then travelling in Italy, made an indelible impression on his mind, and became a stimulating motive to his wishes to excel in his art, in order to demonstrate by his proficiency that

he was not unworthy of their solicitude. He had a table constructed so as to enable him to draw while he lay in bed; and in that situation he amused and improved himself in delineating the picturesque conceptions which were constantly presenting themselves to his fancy.

VIII. When he was so far recovered as to be able to take exercise, and to endure the fatigue of travelling, a circumstance happened which may be numbered among the many fortunate accidents of his professional career. Mr. Matthews, the manager of the important commercial concerns of Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford, was one of those singular men who are but rarely met with in mercantile life, combining the highest degree of literary and elegant accomplishments, with the best talents for active business. He was not only confessedly one of the finest classical scholars in all Italy, but, out of all comparison, the best practical antiquary, perhaps, then in that

country, uniting, along with the minutest accuracy of criticism, a delicacy of taste in the perception of the beauty and judgment of the ancients, seldom found blended with an equal degree of classical erudition. Affairs connected with the business of the house, and a wish to see the principal cities of Italy, led Mr. Matthews, about the period of Mr. West's recovery, to visit Florence, and it was agreed between them that they should together make the tour recommended by Mengs.

IX. In the mean time, the good fortune of West was working to happy effects in another part of the world. The story of Mr. Robinson's portrait had made so great a noise among the travellers in Italy, that Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford, in sending back the ship to Philadelphia, in which the artist had come passenger, mentioned it in their letters to Mr. Allen. It is seldom that commercial affairs are mingled with those of art, and

it was only from the Italian shore that a mercantile house could introduce such a topic into their correspondence. It happened that on the very day this letter reached Mr. Allen, Mr. Hamilton then governor of Pennsylvania, and the principal members of the government, along with the most considerable citizens of Philadelphia, were dining with him. After dinner, Mr. Allen read the letter to the company, and mentioned the amount of the sum of money which West had paid into his hands at the period of his departure from America, adding that it must be pretty far reduced. But, said he with warmth, "I regard this young man as an honour to the country, and as he is the first that America has sent to cultivate the fine arts, he shall not be frustrated in his studies, for I have resolved to write to my correspondents at Leghorn, to give him, from myself, whatever money he may require." Mr. Hamilton felt the force of this generous declaration, and said, with equal animation, "I think exactly

as you do, sir, but you shall not have all the honour of it to yourself, and, therefore, I beg that you will consider me as joining you in the responsibility of the credit." The consequence of this was, that upon West going, previously to leaving Florence, to take a small sum of about ten pounds from the bankers to whom he had been recommended by Messrs. Jackson and Rutherford, a letter was brought in, while he was waiting for his money, and the gentleman who opened it, said to him, "that the contents of the letter would probably afford him unexpected pleasure, as it instructed them to give him unlimited credit." A more splendid instance of liberality is not to be found even in the records of Florence. The munificence of the Medici was excelled by that of the magistracy of Philadelphia.

## CHAPTER VIII.

I. The result of the artist's experiment to discover the methods by which Titian produced his splendid colouring. II. He returns to Rome. III. Reflections suggested, by inspecting the Egyptian obelisk. IV. Considerations of the author on the same subject; and anecdote of a Mohawk Indian who became an actor at New York. V. Anecdote of a Scottish fanatic who arrived in Rome to convert the pope. VI. Sequel of the adventure. VII. The artist prepares to visit England. VIII. Having completed his St. Jerome, after Corrègio's famous picture, he is elected an honorary member of the academy of Parma, and invited to court. IX. He proceeds by the way of Genoa towards France. X. Reflections on the state of Italy. XI. Adventure on reaching the French frontiers. XII. State of taste in France.

I. **F**ROM Florence the artist proceeded to Bologna, and having staid some time there, carefully inspecting every work of celebrity to which he could obtain access, he went on to Venice, visiting in his route all the objects which Mengs had recommended to his attention. The style of Titian, which in breadth and clearness of colouring so much

excels that of almost every other painter, was the peculiar characteristic of the Venetian school which interested him the most, and seemed to him, at first, involved in inexplicable mystery. He was never satisfied with the explanations which the Italian amateurs attempted to give him of what they called the internal light of that master's productions. Repeated experiments, however, enabled him, at last, to make the discovery himself. Indeed, he was from the first persuaded that it was chiefly owing to the peculiar genius of the artist himself, to an exquisite delicacy of sight which enabled him to perceive the most approximate tints, and not to any particular dexterity of pencilling, nor to any superiority in the materials of his colours. This notion led Mr. West to try the effect of painting in the first place with the pure primary colours, and softening them afterwards with the semi tints; and the result confirmed him in the notion that such was probably the peculiar method of

Titian. But although this idea was suggested by his visits to the collections of Venice, he was not perfectly satisfied with its soundness as a rule, till many years after his arrival in London, and many unsuccessful experiments.

II. Having completed his tour to the most celebrated repositories of art in Italy, and enriched his mind, and improved his taste, by the perusal rather than the imitation of their best pieces, he returned to Rome, and applied himself to a minute and assiduous study of the great ornaments of that capital, directing his principal attention to the works of Raphael, and improving his knowledge of the ancient costume by the study of Cameos, in which he was assisted by Mr. Wilcox, the author of the *Roman Conversations*,—to whom he had been introduced by Mr. Robinson, at Mr. Crespigné's, on the occasion of the exhibition of the portrait,—a man of singular attainments in learning, and of a serene and composed dignity of mind and

manners that rendered him more remarkable to strangers than even his great classical knowledge.

III. Of all the monuments of ancient art in Rome, the obelisk brought from Egypt, in the reign of Augustus, interested his curiosity the most, and even for a time affected him as much as those which so agitated him by their beauty. The hieroglyphics appeared to resemble so exactly the figures in the wampum belts of the Indians, that it occurred to him, if ever the mysteries of Egypt were to be interpreted, it might be by the aborigines of America. This singular notion was not, however, the mere suggestion of fancy, but the effect of an opinion which his early friend and tutor provost Smith conceived, in consequence of attending the grand meeting of the Indian chiefs, with the governors of the British colonies, held at East town, in Pennsylvania, in the year following the disastrous fate of Braddock's army. The

chiefs had requested this interview, in order to state to the officers the wrongs and injuries of which they complained; and at the meeting they evidently read the reports and circumstances of their grievances from the hieroglyphical chronicle of the wampum belts, which they held in their hands, and by which, from the date of their grand alliance with William Penn, the man from the ocean, as they called him, they minutely related all the circumstances in which they conceived the terms and spirit of the treaty had been infringed by the British, defying the officers to show any one point in which the Indians had swerved from their engagements. It seemed to Dr. Smith that such a minute traditionary detail of facts could not have been preserved without some contemporary record; and he, therefore, imagined, that the constant reference made to the figures on the belts was a proof that they were chronicles. This notion was countenanced by another circumstance, which Mr. West had himself

often noticed. The course of some of the high roads through Pennsylvania lies along what were formerly the war tracks of the Indians; and he had frequently seen hieroglyphics engraved on the trees and rocks. He was told, that they were inscriptions left by some of the tribes who had passed that way, in order to apprise their friends of the route which they had taken, and of any other matter which it concerned them to know. He had also noticed among the Indians who annually visited Philadelphia, that there were certain old chiefs who occasionally instructed the young warriors to draw red and black figures, similar to those which are made on the belts, and who explained their signification with great emphasis, while the students listened to the recital with profound silence and attention. It was not, therefore, extraordinary, that, on seeing similar figures on the Egyptian trophy, he should have thought that they were intended to transmit the record of transactions like the wampum

belts. A language of signs derived from natural objects, must have something universal in its very nature; for the qualities represented by the emblematic figure, would, doubtless, be those for which the original of the figure was most remarkable: and, therefore, if there be any resemblance between the Egyptian hieroglyphics and those used by the American Indians, the probability is, that there is also some similar intrinsic meaning in their signification. But the wampum belts are probably not all chronicles; there is reason to believe that some of them partake of the nature of calendars, by which the Indians are regulated in proceedings dependant on the seasons; and that, in this respect, they answer to the household gods of the patriarchal times, which are supposed to have been calendars, and the figure of each an emblem of some portion of the year, or sign of the zodiac. It would be foreign to the nature of this work to investigate the evidence which may be adduced on this

subject, or to collect those various and scattered hints which have given rise to the opinion, and with a faint, but not fallacious ray, have penetrated that obscure region of ancient history, between the period when the devotion of mankind, withdrawn from the worship of the Deity, was transferred to the adoration of the stars, and prior to the still greater degradation of the human faculties when altars were raised to idols.

IV. The idea of the Indians being in possession of hieroglyphical writings, is calculated to lead us to form a very different opinion of them to that which is usually entertained by the world. Except in the mere enjoyments of sense, they do not appear to be inferior to the rest of mankind; and their notions of moral dignity are exactly those which are recommended to our imitation by the literature of all antiquity. But they have 'a systematic contempt for whatever either tends to increase their troubles, to encumber the freedom of their

motions, or to fix them to settled habitations. In their unsheltered nakedness, they have a prouder consciousness of their importance in the scale of beings, than the philosophers of Europe, with all their multiplicity of sensual and intellectual gratifications, to supply which so many of the human race are degraded from their natural equality. The Indian, however, is not deficient in mental enjoyments, or a stranger to the exercise of the dignified faculties of our common nature. He delivers himself on suitable occasions with a majesty of eloquence that would beggar the oratory of the parliaments, and the pulpits of Christendom; and his poetry unfolds the loftiest imagery and sentiment of the epic and the hymn. He considers himself as the lord of the creation, and regards the starry heaven as his canopy, and the everlasting mountain as his throne. It would be absurd, however, to assert with Rousseau, that he is, therefore, better or happier than civilized man; but it would be

equally so to deny him the same sense of dignity, the same feeling of dishonour, the same love of renown, or ascribe to his actions in war, and his recreations in peace, baser motives than to the luxurious warriors and statesmen of Europe. Before Mr. West left America, an attempt was made to educate three young Indians at New York; and their progress, notwithstanding that they still retained something of their original wildness of character, exceeded the utmost expectations of those who were interested in the experiment. Two of them, however, in the end, returned to their tribe, but they were rendered miserable by the contempt with which they were received; and the brother of the one who remained behind, was so affected with their degradation, that he came to the city determined to redeem his brother from the thralldom of civilization. On his arrival, he found he had become an actor, and was fast rising into celebrity on the stage. On learning this circumstance,

the resolute Indian went to the theatre, and seated himself in the pit. The moment that his brother appeared, he leapt upon the stage, and drawing his knife, threatened to sacrifice him on the spot, unless he would immediately strip himself naked, and return with him to their home in the woods. He upbraided him with the meanness of his disposition, in consenting to make himself a slave. He demanded if he had forgotten that the Great Spirit had planted the Indian corn for their use, and filled the forests with game, the air with birds, and the waters with fish, that they might be free. He represented the institutions of civilized society as calculated to make him dependent on the labour of others, and subject to every chance that might interrupt their disposition to supply his wants. The actor obeyed his brother, and returning to the woods, was never seen again in the town.\*

\* The following extract from the journal of a friend, who has lately travelled through the principal parts of the

V. It may, perhaps, not be an impertinent digression to contrast this singular occurrence in the theatre of New York,

United States, will probably be found interesting, as it tends to throw some degree of light on the sentiments of the Indians, of which the little that is known, has hitherto never been well elucidated.

“ One of my fellow passengers was a settler in the new state of Tennessee, who had come to Charleston with horses for sale, and was going to Baltimore and Philadelphia for the purpose of investing his money in an assortment of goods suited to the western country. The ideas of civilized and savage life were so curiously blended in this man, that his conversation afforded me considerable amusement. Under the garb and appearance of a methodist preacher, I found him a hunter and a warrior; with no small portion of the adventurous spirit proper to both those characters. He had served as a militia-man or volunteer under general Jackson, in his memorable campaign against the Creek Indians in 1813; and he related to me some interesting particulars of the principal and final action which decided the fate of the war. The Indians had posted themselves at a place called, in their language, *Talapoosie*, and by the Americans, the Horse-shoe; a position of great natural strength, the advantages of which they had improved to the best of their skill, by a breast-work seven feet high, extending across the neck of land which formed the only approach to their encampment. This seems to have been viewed by the Creeks themselves as the last stand of their nation; for, contrary to the usual practice of the Indians, they made every preparation for defence, but none for retreat. Their resistance was proportionably desperate and bloody. For several hours they supported a continued

with another truly European, to which Mr. West was a witness, in the cathedral of St. Peter's. Among other intelligent acquaint-

fire of musketry and cannon without shrinking; till at length the American general, finding that he had lost a great number of men, and that he could not otherwise dislodge the enemy, gave orders for a general assault. The breast-work was carried by storm; and the Indians, broken at all points, and surrounded by superior numbers, were nearly all put to the sword. Out of one thousand warriors who composed the Creek army, scarcely twenty made their escape. A body of Choctaw Indians, who attended the American army as auxiliaries, were the chief actors in this massacre, and displayed their usual barbarous ferocity. It affords a remarkable illustration of the savage character, that the whole of this bloody scene passed in the most perfect silence on the part of the Indians: there was no outcry, no supplication for mercy: each man met his fate without uttering a word, singly defending himself to the last. The lives of the women and children were spared, but many of the boys were killed in the action, fighting bravely in the ranks with their fathers and elder brothers. My Tennessee friend received four arrows from the bows of these juvenile warriors, while in the act of mounting the breast-work.

In hearing such a story, it is impossible not to be touched with a feeling of sympathy for a high-minded but expiring people, thus gallantly but vainly contending, against an overwhelming force, for their native woods, and their name as a nation; or to refrain from lamenting that the settlement of the new world cannot be accomplished at a less price, than the destruction of the original and rightful proprietors of the soil."

tances, which he formed in Rome, was the abaté Grant, one of the adherents of that unfortunate family, whom the baseness of their confidential servants, and the factions of ambitious demagogues, deprived, collectively, of their birth-right. This priest, though a firm jacobite in principle, was, like many others of the same political sentiments, liberal and enlightened, refuting, by his conduct, the false and fraudulent calumnies which have been so long alleged against the gallant men who supported the cause of the ill-fated Stuarts. On St. Peter's day, when the pope in person performs high mass in the cathedral, the abaté offered to take Mr. West to the church, as he could place him among the ecclesiastics, in an advantageous situation to witness the ceremony. Glad of such an offer, Mr. West willingly accompanied him. The vast edifice; the immense multitude of spectators; the sublimity of the music; and the effect of the pomp addressed to the sight, produced on the mind of the

painter feelings scarcely less enthusiastic, than those which the devoutest of the worshippers experienced, or the craftiest inhabitant of the Vatican affected to feel. At the elevation of the host, and as he was kneeling beside the abaté, to their equal astonishment he heard a voice, exclaiming behind them in a broad Scotch accent, "O Lord, cast not the church down on them for this abomination!" The surrounding Italian priests, not understanding what the enthusiast was saying, listened with great comfort to such a lively manifestation of a zeal, which they attributed to the blessed effects of the performance. The abaté, however, with genuine Scotch partiality, was alarmed for his countryman, and endeavoured to persuade him to hold his tongue during the ceremony, as he ran the risk of being torn to pieces by the mob.

VI. It appeared that this zealous presbyterian, without understanding a word of any

civilized language, but only a dialect of his own, had come to Rome for the express purpose of attempting to convert the pope, as the shortest way, in his opinion, of putting an end to the reign of antichrist.—When mass was over, the abaté, anxious to avert from him the consequences which his extravagance would undoubtedly entail, if he continued to persevere in it, entered into conversation with him. It appeared he had only that morning arrived in Babylon, and being unable to rest until he had seen a glimpse of the gorgeous harlot, he had not then provided himself with lodgings. The abaté conducted him to a house where he knew he would be carefully attended; and he also endeavoured to reason with him on the absurdity of his self-assumed mission, assuring him that unless he desisted, and behaved with circumspection, he would inevitably be seized by the inquisition. But the prospect of martyrdom augmented his zeal; and the representations of the

benevolent catholic only stimulated his enterprise; so that in the course of a few days, much to his own exceeding great joy, and with many comfortable salutations of the spirit, he was seized by the inquisition, and lodged in a dungeon. On hearing this, the abaté applied to king James in his behalf, and by his majesty's influence he was released, and sent to the British consul at Leghorn, on condition of being immediately conveyed to his friends in Scotland. It happened, however, that no vessel was then ready to sail, and the taste of persecution partaking more of the relish of adventure than the pungency of suffering, the missionary was not to be so easily frustrated in his meritorious design; and, therefore, he took the first opportunity of stealing silently back to Rome, where he was again arrested and confined. By this time the affair had made some noise, and it was universally thought by all the English travellers, that the best way of treating the ridiculous madman, was to allow him to

remain some time in solitary confinement in the dungeons of the inquisition. When he had been imprisoned about three months, he was again liberated, sent to Leghorn, and embarked for England, radically cured of his inclination to convert the pope, but still believing that the punishment which he had suffered for his folly, would be recorded as a trial which he had endured in the service of the faith.

VII. In the mean time, West was carefully furnishing his mind by an attentive study of the costume of antiquity, and the beauties of the great works of modern genius. In doing this, he regarded Rome only as an university, in which he should graduate; and, as a thesis preparatory to taking his degree among the students, he painted a picture of Cimon and Iphigenia, and, subsequently, another of Angelica and Madoro. The applause which they received justified the opinion which Mengs had so early expressed

of his talent, and certainly answered every object for which they were composed. He was honoured, in consequence, with the marks of academical approbation, usually bestowed on fortunate artists. He then proposed to return to America, with a view to cultivate in his native country that profession in which he had already acquired so much celebrity. At this juncture, he received a letter from his father, advising him, as peace had been concluded between France and England, to go home for a short time before coming to America; for the mother country was at that period still regarded as the home of her American offspring. The advice of his father was in unison with his own wishes, and he mentioned his intention to Mr. Wilcox. That gentleman, conceiving that he spoke of America as his home, expressed himself with grief and surprise at a determination so different from what he had expected; but, upon being informed of the ambiguity in the phrase, he exclaimed

that he could hardly have resolved, on quitting Italy, more opportunely, for Dr. Patoune, a Scottish gentleman, of considerable learning, and some taste in painting, was then returning homeward, and waiting at that time in Rome, until he should be able to meet with a companion. It was therefore agreed that West should be introduced to him; and it was soon after arranged that the doctor should proceed to Florence, while the artist went to take leave of his friends at Leghorn, to express to them his gratitude for the advantages he had derived from their constant and extraordinary kindness, which he estimated so highly, that he could not think of leaving Italy without performing this pleasing and honourable pilgrimage. It was also agreed between him and his companion, that the doctor should stop a short time at Parma, until West should have completed a copy of the St. Jerome of Corregio, which he had begun during his visit to that city with Mr. Matthews.

VIII. During their stay at Parma, the academy elected Mr. West a member, an honour which the academies of Florence and Bologna had previously conferred on him; and it was mentioned to the prince that a young American had made a copy of the St. Jerome of Corregio, in a style of excellence such as the oldest academicians had not witnessed. The prince expressed a wish to see this extraordinary artist, particularly when he heard, that he was from Pennsylvania, and a quaker. Mr. West was, in consequence, informed that a visit from him would be acceptable at court; and it was arranged that he should be introduced to his highness by the chief minister. Mr. West thought that, in a matter of this kind, he should regulate his behaviour by what he understood to be the practice in the court of London; and, accordingly, to the astonishment of the whole of the courtiers, he kept his hat on during the audience. This, however, instead of offending the prince,

was observed with evident pleasure, and made his reception more particular and distinguished; for his highness had heard of the peculiar simplicity of the quakers, and of the singularly christian conduct and principles of William Penn.

IX. From Parma he proceeded to Genoa, and thence to Turin. Considering this city as the last stage of his professional observations in Italy, his mind unconsciously took a retrospective view of the different objects he had seen, and the knowledge which he had acquired since his departure from America. Although his art was always uppermost in his thoughts, and although he could not reflect on the course of his observations without pleasure and hope, he was often led to advert to the lamentable state into which every thing, as well as art, had fallen in Italy, in consequence of the general theocratical despotism which overspread the whole country, like an unwhole-

some vapour, and of those minute subdivisions of territory, in which political tyranny exercised its baleful influence even where the ecclesiastical oppression seemed disposed to spare. He saw, in the infamous establishment of the *cicisbeo*, the settled effect of that general disposition to palliate vice, which is the first symptom of decay in nations; and he was convinced that, before vice could be thus exalted into custom, there must exist in the community which would tolerate such an institution, a disregard of all those obligations which it is the pride of virtue to incur, and the object of law to preserve. It seemed to him that every thing in Italy was in a state of disease; and that the moral energy was subsiding, as the vital flame diminishes from the progress of old age. For although the forms and graces of the human character were often seen in all their genuine dignity among the common people, still even the general population seemed to be defective in that detestation

of vice found in all countries in a healthful state of morals, and which is often strongest among the lowest of the vulgar, especially in what respects the conduct of the great. He thought that the commonalty of Italy had lost the tact by which the good and evil of actions are discriminated; and that, whatever was good in their disposition, was constitutional, and unconnected with any principle of religion, or sense of right. In the papal states, this appeared to be particularly the case. All the creative powers of the mind seemed there to be extinct. The country was covered with ruins, and the human character was in ashes. Sometimes, indeed, a few embers of intellect were seen among the clergy; but the brightness of their scintillation was owing to the blackness of death, with which they were contrasted. The splendour of the nobility struck him only as a more conspicuous poverty than the beggary of the common people; and the perfect contempt with

which they treated the feelings of their dependants, seemed to him scarcely less despicable than the apathy with which it was endured. The innumerable examples of the effects of this moral paralysis to which he was a witness on his arrival in Rome, filled him for some time with indescribable anxiety, and all his veneration for the Roman majesty was lost in reflections on the offences which mankind may be brought to commit on one another. But at Genoa, Leghorn, and Venice, the Italians were seen to less disadvantage. Commerce, by diffusing opulence, and interweaving the interests of all classes, preserved in those cities some community of feeling, which was manifested in an interchange of respect and consideration between the higher and the lower orders; and Lucca he thought afforded a perfect exception to the general degeneracy of the country. The inhabitants of that little republic presented the finest view of human nature that he had ever witnessed. With the manliness of the British character

they appeared to blend the suavity of the Italian manners; and their private morals were not inferior to the celebrity of their public virtues. So true it is, that man, under the police and vigilance of despotism, becomes more and more vicious; while, in proportion to the extension of his freedom, is the vigour of his private virtue. When deprived of the right of exercising his own judgment, he feels, as it were, his moral responsibility at an end, and naturally blames the system by which he is oppressed, for the crimes which his own unresisted passions instigate him to commit. To an Englishman the remembrance of a journey in Italy is however often more delightful than that of any other country, for no where else is his arrogance more patiently endured, his eccentricities more humorously indulged, nor the generosity of his character more publicly acknowledged.

X. In coming from Italy into France, Mr. West was particularly struck with the pic-

turesque difference in the character of the peasantry of the two countries; and while he thought, as an artist, that to give appropriate effect to a national landscape, it would not only be necessary to introduce figures in the costume of the country; but in employments and recreations no less national, he was sensible of the truth of a remark which occurs to almost every traveller, that there are different races of the human species, and that the nature of the dog and horse do not vary more in different climates than man himself. In making the observation, he was not, however, disposed to agree with the continental philosophers, that this difference, arising from climate, at all narrowed the powers of the mind, though it influenced the choice of objects of taste. For whatever tends to make the mind more familiar with one class of agreeable sensations than another, will, undoubtedly, contribute to form the cause of that preference for particular qualities in objects by which the characteristics of the taste of different

nations is discriminated. Although, of all the general circumstances which modify the opinions of mankind, climate is, perhaps, the most permanent, it does not, therefore, follow that, because the climate of France or Italy induces the inhabitants to prefer, in works of art, certain qualities of the excellence of which the people of England are not so sensible, the climate of Great Britain does not, in like manner, lead the inhabitants to discover other qualities equally valuable as sources of enjoyment. Thus, in sculpture for example, it would seem that in naked figures the inhabitants of a cold climate can never hope to attain that degree of eminence which we see exemplified in the productions of the Grecian and Italian sculptors; not that the artists may not execute as well, but because they will not so readily find models; or what is perhaps more to the point, they will not find a taste so capable of appreciating the merits of their performances. In Italy the eye is familiar with the human form, in a state of almost complete nudity; and the

beauty of muscular expression, and of the osteological proportions of man, is there as well known as that of the features and complexion of his countenance; but the same degree of nakedness could not be endured in the climate of England, for it is associated with sentiments of modesty and shame, which render even the accidental innocent exposure of so much of the body offensive to the feelings of decorum. It is not, therefore, just to allege, that, because the Italians are a calm, persuasive, and pensive people, and the French all stir, talk, and inconstancy, they are respectively actuated by different moral causes. It will not be asserted that, though the sources of their taste in art spring from different qualities in the same common objects, any innate incapacity for excellence in the fine arts, is induced by the English climate, merely because that climate has the effect of producing a different moral temperament among the inhabitants.

XI. On the morning after arriving at the first frontier town, in coming from Savoy into France, and while breakfast was preparing, Mr. West and his companion heard the noise of a crowd assembled in the yard of the inn. The doctor rose and went to the window to inquire the occasion: immediately on his appearance, the mob became turbulent, and seemed to menace him with some outrage. The peace of 1763 had been but lately concluded, and without having any other cause for the thought, it occurred to the travellers that the turbulence must have originated in some political occurrence, and they hastily summoned the landlord, who informed them, "that the people had, indeed, assembled in a tumultuous manner round the inn on hearing that two Englishmen were in the house, but that they might make themselves easy, as he had sent to inform the magistrates of the riot." Soon after, one of the magistrates arrived, and on being introduced by the landlord to the travellers, expressed himself to the following effect:

"I am sorry that this occurrence should have happened, because had I known in time, I should, on hearing that you were Englishmen, have come with the other magistrates to express to you the sentiments of respect which we feel towards your illustrious nation; but, since it has not been in our power to give you that testimony of our esteem; on the contrary, since we are necessitated by our duty to protect you, I assure you that I feel exceedingly mortified. I trust, however, that you will suffer no inconvenience, for the people are dispersing, and you will be able to leave the town in safety!"

"This place," he continued, "is a manufacturing town, which has been almost ruined by the war. Our goods went to the ocean from Marseilles and Toulon; but the vigilance of your fleets ruined our trade, and these poor people, who have felt the consequence, considered not the real cause of their distress. However, although the populace do not look beyond the effects which immediately press upon themselves, there are many among us

well acquainted with the fountain-head of the misfortunes which afflict France, and who know that it is less to you than to ourselves that we ought to ascribe the disgraces of the late war. You had a man at the head of your government (alluding to the first lord Chatham), and your counsellors are men. But it is the curse of France that she is ruled by one, who is, in fact, but the agent and organ of valets and strumpets. The court of France is no longer the focus of the great men of the country, but a band of profligates that have driven away the great. This state of things, however, cannot last long, the reign of the Pompadours must draw to an end, and Frenchmen will one day take a terrible revenge for the insults which they suffer in being regarded only as the materials of those who pander to the prodigality of the court." This singular address, made in the year 1763, requires no comment; but it is a curious historical instance of the commencement of that moral re-action to oppression which subsequently has so

fully realized the prediction of the magistrate, and which, in its violence, has done so much mischief, and occasioned so many misfortunes to Europe.

XII. The travellers remained no longer in Paris than was necessary to inspect the principal works of the French artists, and the royal collections. Mr. West, however, continued long enough to be satisfied, that the true feeling for the fine arts did not exist among the French to that degree which he had observed in Italy. On the contrary, it seemed to him that there was an inherent affectation in the general style of art among them, which demonstrated, not only a deficiency of native sensibility, but an anxious endeavour to conceal that defect. The characteristics of the French school, and they have not yet been redeemed by the introduction of any better manner, might, to a cursory observer, appear to have arisen from a corrupted taste, while, in fact, they are the consequences only of that inordinate national

vanity, which in so many different ways, has retarded the prosperity of the world. In the opinion of a Frenchman, there is a quality of excellence in every thing belonging to France, merely because it is French, which gives at all times a certain degree of superiority to the actions and productions of his countrymen; and this delusive notion has infested not only the literature and the politics of the nation, but also the principles of art, to such a deep and inveterate extent, that the morality of painting is not yet either felt or understood in that country. In the mechanical execution, in drawing, and in the arrangement of the parts, great French painters are probably equal to the Italians; but in producing any other sentiment in the spectator than that of admiration at their mechanical skill, they are greatly behind the English. Painting has much of a common character with dramatic literature, and the very best pictures of the French artists have the same kind of resemblance to the probability of nature, that the tragedies of their

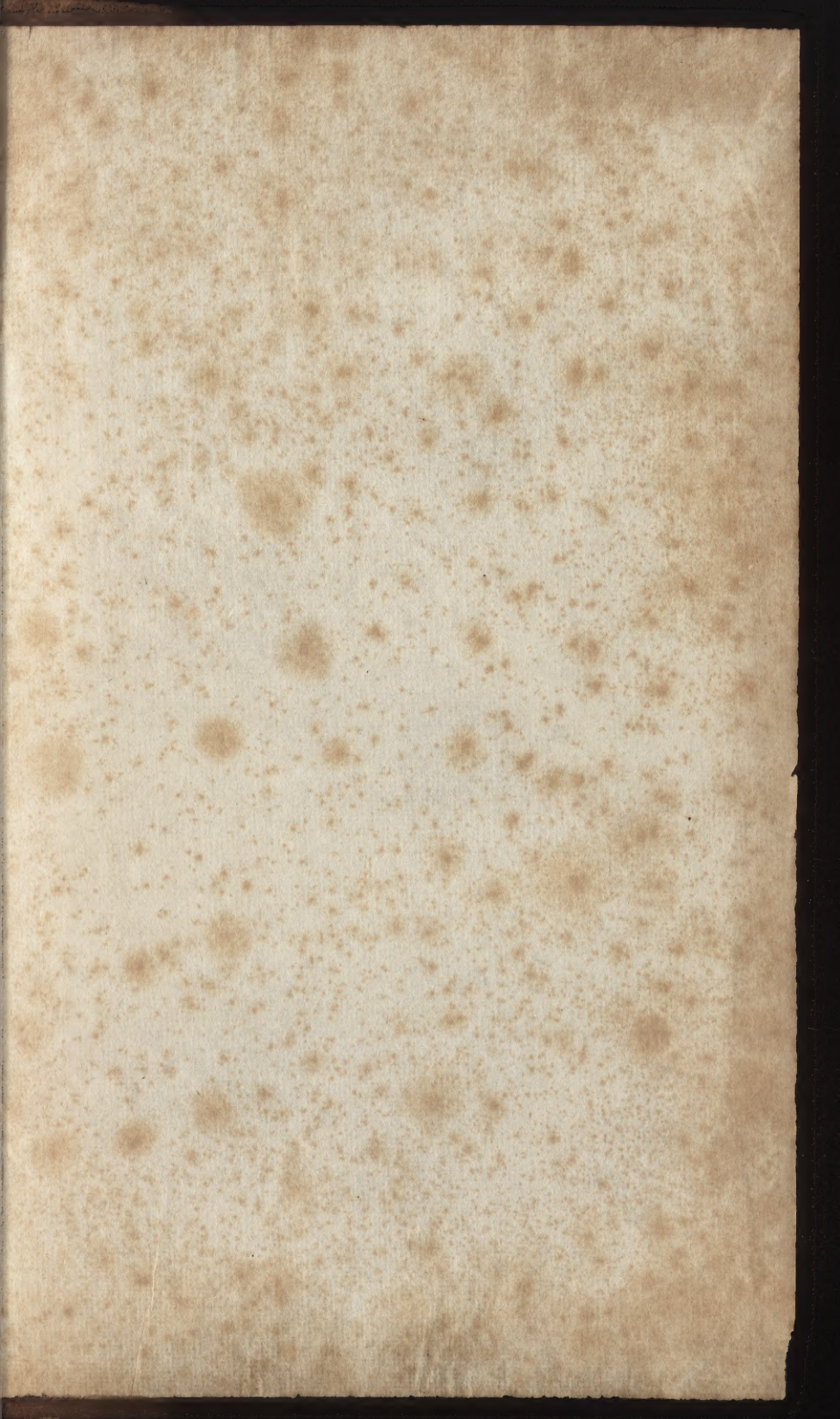
great dramatic authors have to the characters and actions of men. But in rejecting the pretensions of the French to superiority either in the one species of art or in the other, the rejection ought not to be extended too far. They are wrong in their theory; but their practice so admirably accords with it, that it must be allowed, were it possible for a people so enchanted by self-conceit, to discover that the true subjects of art exist only in nature, they evince a capacity sufficient to enable them to acquire the pre-eminence which they unfortunately believe they have already attained. But these opinions, with respect to the peculiarities of the French taste, though deduced from incidental remarks in conversations with Mr. West, must not be considered as his. The respect which he has always entertained towards the different members of his own profession, never allows him to express himself in any terms that might possibly be construed by malice or by ignorance, to imply any thing derogatory to a class which he naturally considers among

the teachers of mankind. He may think, indeed he has expressed as much, that the style of the French artists is not the most perspicuous; and that it is, if the expression may be allowed, more rhetorical than eloquent; but still he regards them as having done honour to their country, and, in furnishing objects of innocent interest to the minds of mankind, as having withdrawn so far the inclinations of the heart from mere sensual objects. The true use of painting, he early thought, must reside in assisting the reason to arrive at correct moral inferences, by furnishing a probable view of the effects of motives and of passions; and to the enforcement of this great argument his long life has been devoted, whether with complete success it would be presumptuous in any contemporary to determine, and injudicious in the author of these memoirs to assert.

THE END.







AAW  
N761  
stb

83-B12046

9/8/

PPW

